**Research Article**

# International Humanitarian Corridors: A Survey on Regulatory Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

This research article examines the regulatory framework of International Humanitarian Corridors (IHCs), concentrating on their legal foundations, practical implementation, and oversight mechanisms. As critical instruments for safeguarding civilians and delivering humanitarian aid during armed conflicts, IHCs have gained prominence but lack a cohesive regulatory framework. The study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising legal document analysis, comparative case studies (Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Gaza), and a content review of humanitarian policy documents. The findings reveal a fragmented legal architecture, where international humanitarian law provides foundational principles but fails to specify operational norms for International Humanitarian Corps (IHCs). Furthermore, regulatory perspectives differ significantly across national and international actors, complicating the implementation process. Theoretical insights from humanitarian ethics and legal positivism underpin the study, highlighting the tension between normative obligations and the sovereignty of states. Key challenges identified include politicisation, inconsistent enforcement, and limited legal accountability. The article concludes with strategic recommendations for the codification of IHC norms and enhanced institutional coordination. Future research is proposed to examine the integration of technology, comparative legal systems, and civilian narratives in corridor design.

# 1. Introduction

The intensification of armed conflicts, civil wars, and natural disasters over the past decades has necessitated the evolution of mechanisms that ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Among the most prominent of these mechanisms are humanitarian corridors, which serve as designated routes or zones that allow for the safe movement of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of civilians. These corridors are vital lifelines in crises where conventional access is obstructed by active hostilities, geopolitical constraints, or deliberate targeting of humanitarian operations (ICRC, 2013; OCHA, 2020).

Despite their growing application in conflict zones such as Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia, the legal and regulatory landscape governing humanitarian corridors remains fragmented, inconsistent, and often ambiguous. While international humanitarian law (IHL) provides foundational principles such as the protection of civilians and the obligation to facilitate humanitarian relief, it does not offer a comprehensive or codified framework specific to the establishment and operation of humanitarian corridors. Consequently, the creation of these corridors is often subject to ad hoc negotiations between states, non-state actors, and international organisations, frequently resulting in contested interpretations and inconsistent enforcement (Roberts, 1996; Slim, 2015).

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 are widely regarded as the cornerstone of modern international humanitarian law (IHL). These instruments mandate that parties to a conflict allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, particularly in non-international armed conflicts (Geneva Convention IV, 1949; Additional Protocol II, 1977, Art. 18). However, these legal obligations are often subordinated to the principle of state sovereignty and the requirement of consent, creating a legal paradox where the imperative of humanitarian access is frequently trumped by political considerations (Lattimer & Sands, 2012).

Moreover, the regulatory perspective on humanitarian corridors—encompassing legal, institutional, and operational dimensions—has not kept pace with the rising need for such mechanisms. Most humanitarian corridors are implemented under soft-law instruments, bilateral agreements, or Security Council resolutions that lack binding enforcement provisions. The absence of a dedicated international regulatory body or a standardised protocol has enabled the selective interpretation and politicisation of humanitarian corridors. For instance, in the Syrian conflict, the establishment of humanitarian corridors has been marred by repeated violations, logistical failures, and accusations of their use as military strategies by belligerent parties (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2016; UN OCHA, 2020).

In addition to legal and political challenges, operational issues such as insufficient coordination among humanitarian actors, lack of real-time information, inadequate security guarantees, and funding shortfalls have further complicated the effective functioning of humanitarian corridors. These practical obstacles underscore the need for a more coherent and enforceable regulatory approach that integrates legal norms with practical guidelines for implementation (Baldwin, Cave, & Lodge, 2012).

This research article aims to conduct a systematic survey of regulatory perspectives on international humanitarian corridors. It seeks to answer the following key questions: What are the existing international legal norms that regulate humanitarian corridors? How do states and international organisations operationalise these norms? What challenges emerge in their practical implementation, and how can the regulatory framework be improved?

To address these questions, the study adopts a legal positivist framework grounded in international humanitarian law, combined with regulatory theory to assess institutional roles and enforcement mechanisms. The article proceeds through a comprehensive literature review, a theoretical framing, and a qualitative legal analysis of three major case studies—Syria, Ukraine, and Ethiopia—each of which illustrates different dimensions of regulatory

challenges and opportunities. Through this analysis, the study hopes to contribute to the development of a more structured, accountable, and effective legal regime for humanitarian corridors.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of humanitarian corridors has gained increasing attention in international relations, humanitarian law, and conflict studies. While the practical utility of such corridors in war-torn or disaster-affected regions is evident, academic and policy-oriented literature presents a fragmented and evolving understanding of their legal underpinnings, regulatory mechanisms, and implementation dynamics. This section provides a critical review of the existing literature across four thematic areas: historical evolution and typologies, legal foundations and international norms, operational and political challenges, and regulatory and institutional frameworks.

### 2.1. Historical Evolution and Typologies

Humanitarian corridors, although popularised in recent decades, have precedents dating back to the early 20th century. The evacuation of civilians during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and humanitarian operations in World War II are often cited as early examples of corridor-like mechanisms (Weissman, 2011). However, it was during the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s—particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina—that the term "humanitarian corridor" entered the lexicon of international humanitarian operations (Minear & Weiss, 1995).

Typologies of humanitarian corridors vary. Slim (2015) classifies them based on purpose: evacuation corridors, aid delivery corridors, and safe zones. Others distinguish between unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral corridors, depending on the parties involved in their establishment (Ferris, 2011). These classifications are vital as they influence the legal basis, operational strategy, and political legitimacy of each corridor type.

### 2.2. Legal Foundations and International Norms

The legal literature on humanitarian corridors often centres on international humanitarian law (IHL),

particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977. These documents establish general obligations for parties in armed conflicts to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and Articles 18 and 70 of the Additional Protocols form the bedrock of legal justifications for humanitarian access (ICRC, 2013).

However, there is no explicit provision in IHL that comprehensively codifies the concept of "humanitarian corridors" as a standalone legal institution. As Sassòli (2019) notes, the legal framework is interpretative rather than prescriptive, leaving room for broad discretion by state and non-state actors. This has resulted in a reliance on soft-law instruments, UN Security Council resolutions, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for the practical establishment of corridors (Bothe, 2018).

The concept of "consent" is central to the legality of humanitarian corridors. Under Article 70(1) of Additional Protocol I, the consent of the affected state is generally required to provide humanitarian assistance. However, this consent can be unreasonably withheld or politically manipulated, thereby undermining humanitarian objectives (Terry, 2002). In recent years, scholars have explored the tension between state sovereignty and the right to humanitarian assistance, particularly in non-international armed conflicts (Clapham, 2015; Akande & Gillard, 2016).

### 2.3. Operational and Political Challenges

Despite the normative endorsement of humanitarian corridors, operationalising them poses severe challenges. Security concerns, lack of trust between parties, and logistical limitations frequently derail corridor effectiveness (UN OCHA, 2020). In Syria, for instance, humanitarian corridors have often been unilaterally declared by the government or external actors, raising concerns about their neutrality and voluntary nature (MSF, 2016). Reports have documented incidents where civilians were coerced into using corridors that led into government-controlled areas, compromising the fundamental principle of voluntary movement (UNHRC, 2018).

The issue of militarisation further complicates operational efforts. Humanitarian corridors have occasionally been used for strategic military gains, such as relocating populations from opposition-held to regime-controlled territories, effectively amounting to forced displacement (Ferris & Kirişci, 2016). In Ukraine, corridors negotiated during the 2022 Russian invasion experienced repeated violations, leading to deaths, delays, and increased mistrust among parties (ICRC, 2022).

Additionally, the lack of coordination among international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and host governments hampers effective implementation. Research by de Waal (2014) emphasises that humanitarian operations in conflict zones suffer from a "coordination dilemma," where overlapping mandates, competition for visibility, and bureaucratic inertia reduce operational efficiency.

## 2.4. Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks

The literature reflects a growing consensus on the regulatory deficit surrounding humanitarian corridors. While norms exist under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), there is no dedicated institutional mechanism or treaty specifically regulating their creation, management, or accountability. This void has led scholars to explore regulatory theory and governance models to understand and address this gap.

Baldwin, Cave, and Lodge (2012) propose a tripartite regulatory model consisting of standard-setting, behaviour modification, and monitoring. Applied to humanitarian corridors, this model suggests the need for clearly defined protocols, incentives or sanctions for compliance, and independent mechanisms for oversight. However, in the current humanitarian system, no global body plays this role comprehensively.

The United Nations, particularly through OCHA and UNHCR, plays a central but limited role. While these agencies often facilitate negotiations and monitor implementation, their regulatory powers are constrained by mandates, funding, and the politics of member states (Weiss, 2013). In situations such as Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, the lack of enforceable international standards resulted in fragmented and delayed corridor operations (HRW, 2021).

Moreover, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have attempted to develop policy guidelines on humanitarian access. However, these frameworks remain largely advisory and context-dependent (AU, 2019; EU, 2020). The emerging body of soft law, including the Sphere Standards and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, provides valuable operational guidance but lacks legal enforceability (Sphere Project, 2018).

Recent academic work calls for a new normative framework explicitly tailored to humanitarian corridors. This includes proposals for a UN Convention on Humanitarian Access, model protocols for corridor operation, and independent regulatory bodies akin to those in environmental or trade law (Sandoz, 2020; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2021). While these ideas are in early stages, they reflect growing dissatisfaction with the current status quo and a push toward more structured governance.

## 2.5. Critical Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the wealth of literature, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of comparative empirical studies on the effectiveness of humanitarian corridors across different conflict zones. Most analyses focus on case studies without synthesising cross-national data (Pantuliano, 2014). Second, the voices of affected populations are often missing in regulatory debates, with limited qualitative data on civilian experiences and preferences regarding corridor use.

Third, the interaction between domestic legal systems and international norms in regulating humanitarian corridors is underexplored. Some states have developed national guidelines or military doctrines on humanitarian access, but their compatibility with international humanitarian law (IHL) is rarely scrutinised (Stoddard et al., 2017).

Finally, literature on technological integration— such as digital mapping, blockchain logistics, and AI

forecasting in humanitarian corridors—remains nascent. These tools offer new possibilities for transparency, security, and accountability but require corresponding regulatory innovation (Greenwood et al., 2017).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of international humanitarian corridors from a regulatory perspective necessitates a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesises insights from international law, governance theory, and regulatory studies. This section introduces and justifies the three main theoretical lenses that underpin this research: International Legal Positivism, Global Governance Theory, and the Responsive Regulation Model. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of how humanitarian corridors are conceptualised, legalised, operationalised, and contested in global contexts.

### 3.1. International Legal Positivism

International Legal Positivism provides the foundational lens through which the legal legitimacy of humanitarian corridors is assessed. Legal positivism posits that the validity of legal norms originates from formal sources, such as treaties, customs, and general principles of law, rather than from moral or ethical considerations (Kelsen, 1945). Under this framework, humanitarian corridors are evaluated based on their grounding in established instruments of international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977.

Legal positivism is particularly relevant in clarifying the juridical ambiguity surrounding humanitarian corridors. While the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides general provisions for humanitarian access and civilian protection, it does not codify the concept of "corridors" per se (Sassòli, 2019). This absence allows for flexible interpretation, but also results in regulatory fragmentation and inconsistent application by states and non-state actors. As such, legal positivism enables a critical examination of normative deficits, state consent, and customary practices, providing a structured lens to assess the balance between legality and practicality.

### 3.2. Global Governance Theory

The second theoretical pillar is Global Governance Theory, which shifts the focus from legal structures to political and institutional arrangements that facilitate or hinder humanitarian access. This approach views global governance as a system in which state and non-state actors, including international organisations (e.g., the United Nations), NGOs, and private contractors, collaborate to manage transnational issues (Rosenau, 1992; Weiss, 2000).

Global Governance Theory is instrumental in understanding the multipolarity and decentralisation of authority in the operation of humanitarian corridors. In many cases, corridors are established not solely through state consent, but through multi-actor negotiations involving humanitarian agencies, regional organisations, and armed groups (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). This model accommodates the normative pluralism and power asymmetries inherent in humanitarian interventions, exposing the political economies and institutional weaknesses that challenge regulatory consistency and enforceability.

Through this lens, humanitarian corridors are not merely legal constructs but rather products of global political negotiation, shaped by sovereignty, diplomacy, and geopolitical interests. Governance theory thus facilitates the examination of soft-law instruments, interagency coordination, and accountability mechanisms within an increasingly complex international humanitarian regime.

### 3.3. Responsive Regulation Model

The third theoretical strand draws from the Responsive Regulation Model, developed by Ayres and Braithwaite (1992), a regulatory theory initially applied in economic and corporate domains. However, it has increasingly adapted to humanitarian and human rights governance. This model advocates for a regulatory pyramid, wherein enforcement begins with persuasion and capacity-building, escalating to sanctions and legal enforcement when compliance fails to occur.

In the context of humanitarian corridors, responsive regulation suggests a flexible, graduated approach to oversight—starting with voluntary compliance by host states and parties to conflict, supported by guidelines, best practices, and international norms. Suppose access is obstructed or corridors are misused (e.g., for forced evacuations or military advantage). In that case, the model permits escalation through naming and shaming, sanctions, or intervention mandates authorised by multilateral bodies, such as the UN Security Council.

This theory is particularly relevant in analysing non-compliance scenarios, where state or non-state actors obstruct humanitarian access. It also emphasises the importance of dialogue, trust-building, and adaptive strategies, aligning with modern humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence (Slim, 2015).

## 4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology that integrates documentary analysis, comparative legal analysis, and expert opinion triangulation to survey the regulatory perspectives governing international humanitarian corridors. This approach enables an in-depth examination of the evolving legal and policy frameworks, implementation challenges, and enforcement mechanisms across various geopolitical contexts.

### 4.1. Research Design

Given the normative and interpretive focus of the research, a descriptive-analytical design is utilised to dissect legal instruments, institutional guidelines, and empirical case studies. The study is exploratory and does not aim to test a hypothesis but instead seeks to uncover patterns, regulatory tensions, and legal ambiguities in the operationalisation of humanitarian corridors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions guiding this inquiry are:

- What international legal and regulatory instruments govern the creation and operation of humanitarian corridors?
- How do state and non-state actors interpret and apply these regulations in conflict and disaster scenarios?

- What are the main challenges and gaps in the current regulatory frameworks, and what models offer improved oversight and compliance?

### 4.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary sources:

Primary legal documents include international treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, resolutions from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and guidelines from humanitarian organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Secondary literature, including academic journal articles, books, policy reports, and think tank publications from recognised bodies (e.g., Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group), was reviewed to contextualise legal interpretations and operational experiences (Bowen, 2009).

Case studies: Documented instances of humanitarian corridors were analysed from Syria (Aleppo, 2016), Ukraine (Mariupol, 2022), Ethiopia (Tigray, 2021), and Sudan (Khartoum, 2023). These case studies were selected based on their relevance, diversity in geopolitical context, and availability of documentation.

### 4.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a thematic coding approach to identify recurring themes across documents and case studies. Themes included the legal basis for corridor establishment, challenges to implementation, compliance and enforcement mechanisms, and political manipulation of humanitarian access. The legal documents were examined through normative legal analysis—assessing their authority, applicability, and scope (Tushnet, 1999).

The comparative method was used to analyse how different legal regimes and operational contexts affect the success or failure of humanitarian corridors. This allowed for cross-case insights into regulatory

consistency and variance across international, regional, and national levels (Landman, 2008).

## 4.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility and triangulation, multiple sources were cross-verified for accuracy. For instance, United Nations reports were compared against NGO assessments and scholarly critiques to reduce bias and enhance objectivity. Expert interviews were not conducted due to the study's focus on documentary evidence; however, cross-referencing helped validate the interpretations and findings.

## 4.5. Ethical Considerations

As this study is based entirely on publicly available and secondary data, it did not require ethical clearance for human subjects. Nonetheless, the research adhered to academic integrity by appropriately attributing sources, maintaining neutrality, and avoiding selective citation or politicised interpretation (Silverman, 2021).

## 5. Legal Foundations of Humanitarian Corridors

The legal foundation of humanitarian corridors is rooted in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), with auxiliary support from International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs). Although not explicitly defined in any single treaty, the practice of humanitarian corridors is inferred from principles and articles found in several foundational texts.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949, particularly the Fourth Convention concerning the protection of civilian persons in times of war, are a primary legal source. Articles 23 and 59 affirm the right of humanitarian relief and the obligation of occupying powers to permit and facilitate the passage of such aid, provided it is impartial and conducted without adverse distinction (ICRC, 2016). Furthermore, Protocol I (1977) supplements these conventions by explicitly referencing the passage of relief actions, implying the legal viability of secure zones and humanitarian access routes (Sassòli, 2019).

Customary International Law also plays a role in shaping expectations around humanitarian corridors. The ICRC Customary Law Study (2005) identifies Rules 55 and 56, which emphasise that parties to conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians and ensure the freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005). While these rules are often non-binding for non-signatory entities, their repeated invocation and implementation reinforce their customary status.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions add binding international authority. For instance, UNSCR 2139 (2014) on Syria demanded unhindered humanitarian access, including across conflict lines. Similarly, UNSCR 2417 (2018) addresses the linkage between armed conflict and food insecurity, requiring parties to conflicts to allow humanitarian aid (UNSC, 2018).

While these instruments form a legal scaffolding, they lack a unified definition or codification of "humanitarian corridors," leaving their scope and enforcement susceptible to the whims of political will and military realities. The result is a legal grey zone, where state sovereignty and humanitarian imperatives often collide.

## 6. Regulatory Perspectives: National and International Frameworks

The regulatory governance of humanitarian corridors involves a complex interaction of international law, state-level legal systems, and operational frameworks administered by intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. Understanding the regulatory perspectives requires an analysis of how these actors implement, adapt, or resist overarching legal norms.

At the international level, the regulatory environment is shaped by instruments like the Geneva Conventions, UN General Assembly resolutions, and protocols issued by the ICRC and OCHA. These actors provide guidance but do not have the authority to enforce coercively. For instance, OCHA's "Humanitarian Access Guidelines" establish practical

standards for corridor operation; however, compliance is contingent upon negotiation with local authorities (OCHA, 2020).

Regional organisations have also played regulatory roles. The African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) have adopted regional humanitarian frameworks. The EU's Humanitarian Aid Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96) emphasises the importance of neutrality and access, although it does not explicitly establish humanitarian corridors (European Commission, 2022).

National frameworks vary greatly. In democratic states, national emergency and disaster laws may incorporate mechanisms for foreign humanitarian access, such as corridor agreements with United Nations (UN) agencies. In contrast, authoritarian or conflict-affected states may withhold access as a strategic tool, requiring international actors to secure Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or informal assurances with multiple factions (Ferris, 2011).

Some states, like Turkey and Jordan, have codified procedures for cross-border humanitarian access in their border management regulations during the Syrian crisis. Others, such as Sudan and Myanmar, have employed bureaucratic obstructionism or militarised checkpoints to delay or deny the establishment of corridors.

Non-state armed groups, which are increasingly central actors in modern conflicts, often operate outside formal legal frameworks. However, international NGOs and the UN have negotiated humanitarian access agreements that operate under the principle of "humanitarian consent." These are quasi-regulatory instruments that enable corridor operations in ungoverned or rebel-held areas (Pantuliano et al., 2011).

Regulatory fragmentation remains a critical concern. In many conflict zones, overlapping mandates from various UN bodies, a lack of clarity about lead coordination agencies, and divergent rules about safety protocols have created implementation bottlenecks. Furthermore, the non-binding nature of many regulatory instruments often leads to selective compliance, particularly when humanitarian access conflicts with military objectives or concerns about sovereignty.

## 7. Case Studies
### 7.1. Syria – Aleppo (2016)
The Aleppo humanitarian corridors in 2016 marked a controversial example of humanitarian operations in urban warfare contexts. The Syrian government and Russian forces declared the opening of several "humanitarian corridors" for civilians and surrendering combatants. Ostensibly legal under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provisions concerning safe passage, these corridors were criticised by humanitarian organisations for functioning as mechanisms for forced displacement rather than voluntary evacuation (Amnesty International, 2016).

The regulatory oversight was weak: there was no apparent UN involvement in monitoring, and access was controlled exclusively by the government and Russian military personnel. This raised questions about impartiality and civilian consent, highlighting the legal ambiguity that arises when corridor operations are unilateral and not brokered through a multilateral consensus (Sassòli, 2019).

### 7.2. Ukraine – Mariupol (2022)
During the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, humanitarian corridors became central to international advocacy and diplomatic negotiation. The Ukrainian government, supported by international humanitarian agencies, attempted to establish corridors for civilian evacuation from besieged cities like Mariupol. However, reports indicated repeated violations of ceasefires and attacks on convoy routes, breaching international humanitarian law (IHL) norms on protected humanitarian passages (ICRC, 2022).

The UN and OSCE attempted to mediate these operations, but a lack of trust between warring parties undermined the regulatory process. Unlike Syria, establishing a corridor here involved ongoing diplomatic dialogue and media visibility, which

increased compliance pressure. Nevertheless, asymmetric information and military control over routes limited the effectiveness of the corridors.

### 7.3. Ethiopia – Tigray (2021)

In the Tigray conflict, humanitarian access was severely constrained. Despite IHL provisions and the Ethiopian government's formal announcement of humanitarian corridors, relief agencies reported denial of access, bureaucratic delays, and looting of supplies. Regulatory enforcement was virtually absent, as the government did not permit third-party monitoring mechanisms (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

This case underscores how regulatory instruments without oversight can become rhetorical devices. The domestic regulatory apparatus in Ethiopia invoked national sovereignty to override international humanitarian norms, effectively nullifying external pressure to enforce access to humanitarian aid.

### 7.4. Sudan – Khartoum (2023)

The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in 2023 illustrated another layer of regulatory complexity. Efforts by OCHA and the African Union to establish humanitarian corridors in Khartoum and Darfur were met with mixed success. Corridor agreements were frequently breached, with combatants obstructing aid and targeting aid workers.

In this case, hybrid regulatory efforts involving regional, international, and community actors attempted to establish functional corridors. The lack of central authority and the presence of multiple militias made the situation volatile, demonstrating the limits of both formal and informal regulatory systems in fragmented state settings.

## 8. Challenges and Gaps in Regulation

The regulation of humanitarian corridors faces numerous challenges that hinder their efficacy and legitimacy. These challenges can be broadly categorised as legal, political, operational, and institutional.

### 8.1. Legal Ambiguity:

There is no universally accepted legal definition of a humanitarian corridor. While international humanitarian law provides general provisions for humanitarian access, the lack of codification creates interpretive variability (Sassòli, 2019). This leads to inconsistencies in corridor design, scope, and duration. Additionally, the absence of a binding enforcement mechanism under IHL makes it challenging to hold violators accountable, especially when access denials are framed as security measures.

### 8.2. Politicisation of Humanitarian Access:

Humanitarian corridors often become tools of political leverage. Parties to a conflict may manipulate corridor openings for propaganda purposes, to force evacuations, or to regroup militarily (Pantuliano et al., 2011). This politicisation undermines neutrality, compromises humanitarian principles, and erodes trust in the system.

### 8.3. Operational Inconsistencies:

Corridors require agreement on timing, routes, monitoring, and security guarantees. Divergent protocols among actors, limited communication infrastructure, and deliberate obstruction by combatants create operational risks. In many instances, ceasefire violations during corridor operations, such as in Ukraine, have resulted in civilian casualties, nullifying humanitarian intentions (ICRC, 2022).

### 8.4. Fragmented Regulatory Oversight:

Regulatory fragmentation results from the multiplicity of actors involved—UN agencies, NGOs, regional bodies, and state authorities—all operating under distinct mandates. Lack of centralised coordination leads to duplication, confusion, and conflict over leadership in corridor negotiation and monitoring (Ferris, 2011).

### 8.5. Enforcement and Accountability Deficit:

There is a conspicuous enforcement gap in existing regulatory mechanisms. Even when violations occur, such as attacks on aid convoys, there are few judicial or diplomatic repercussions. The UN Security Council's inability to act decisively due to veto politics

further weakens the regulatory architecture (Weiss, 2000).

## 8.6. Exclusion of Non-State Actors from Regulatory Frameworks:

While non-state armed groups control large swathes of territory, they are often excluded from formal regulatory processes due to their unrecognised status. This leaves corridors in such areas regulated by informal, ad hoc agreements that lack durability and legitimacy.

## 9. Conclusion

The examination of international humanitarian corridors (IHCs) reveals a complex intersection of humanitarian necessity, legal obligation, and political will. The study finds that while humanitarian corridors are vital in enabling the safe passage of civilians and aid during armed conflict, their application is marred by inconsistent regulatory frameworks, politicisation, and operational ambiguity. The legal foundation for IHCs is based on international humanitarian law, specifically the Geneva Conventions and related customary norms, which establish the duty to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. However, despite the presence of these foundational norms, the lack of a dedicated international legal instrument governing the precise parameters of IHCs remains a significant gap.

Moreover, the regulatory landscape is fragmented across national and international levels, often influenced by sovereign interests and geopolitical strategies. The case studies—Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Gaza—demonstrate varied implementation outcomes, influenced by the presence of multiple stakeholders, including state actors, non-state armed groups, humanitarian agencies, and international organisations. These cases highlight recurring challenges such as negotiating access, ensuring neutrality, and maintaining transparency in corridor operations.

This study highlights the importance of establishing coherent and enforceable global norms that codify best practices and minimise ambiguity. Additionally, institutional mechanisms that can provide oversight and facilitate real-time negotiation are crucial for future success. The role of the United Nations, particularly through its agencies like OCHA, is pivotal in advancing a regulatory consensus.

Ultimately, while IHCs hold promise as tools for conflict mitigation and humanitarian relief, their effectiveness is contingent upon multilateral cooperation, legal clarity, and an ethical commitment to protecting civilians. As conflicts become increasingly protracted and complex, the urgency for a robust regulatory paradigm grows ever more pressing.

## 9.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several policy and legal recommendations are offered to enhance the effectiveness and governance of international humanitarian corridors:

- Establish a Binding International Legal Instrument: A codified treaty or protocol under international humanitarian law, specifically addressing IHCs, would standardise definitions, mandates, and rules of operation.
- Create a Central Coordinating Mechanism: An independent, multilateral body under the United Nations—possibly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)—should be empowered to oversee the negotiation, implementation, and monitoring of IHCs.
- Promote State and Non-State Actor Engagement: Both state and non-state actors should be bound by common regulatory commitments regarding humanitarian access, which should be monitored through international accountability frameworks.
- Institutionalise Training and Guidelines: Develop practical guidelines and capacity-building programs for military and humanitarian personnel involved in implementing corridors.
- Enhance Legal Accountability: Mechanisms for legal redress and sanctions should be clearly defined for violations of humanitarian access through IHCs.

These recommendations aim to move beyond ad hoc responses and establish a predictable, rights-based approach that upholds humanitarian principles in volatile environments.

**9.2 Future Research**

The evolving nature of armed conflict and humanitarian response necessitates further scholarly inquiry into multiple dimensions of humanitarian corridors. Future research should explore:

- Technology and Digital Governance: Investigating the role of emerging technologies, such as GIS mapping, blockchain for aid tracking, and AI-based risk prediction, could illuminate innovative tools to improve corridor planning and security.
- Comparative Legal Analysis: A focused comparative study on how national legislations integrate (or conflict with) international humanitarian law provisions on IHCs would provide a clearer understanding of implementation barriers.
- Humanitarian Corridors in Climate-Conflict Zones: As climate change intensifies displacement and conflict, research is needed to evaluate how humanitarian corridors (IHCs) can be adapted to mixed emergency scenarios involving environmental and armed crises.
- Civilians' Perspectives: More empirical work, including field surveys and interviews, should be conducted to gather civilian experiences within humanitarian corridors to inform people-centred policy design.
- Long-Term Outcomes: Studies on the sustainability and post-corridor effects, such as community reintegration, infrastructure damage, and psychosocial impacts, remain under-researched but are vital for holistic evaluations.

Advancing research in these areas will contribute significantly to the resilience and accountability of future humanitarian operations.

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