A Baseline Review of the Current Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys in Complex Emergencies

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Disclaimer

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Abbreviations

AE – Armed Escorts[1]
AI – Artificial Intelligence
AoO – Area of Operations
CMAG – Civil-Military Advisory Group
UN-CMCoord – United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination[2]
HCT – Humanitarian Country Team[3]
HAWG – Humanitarian Access Working Group
IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO – International Nongovernmental Organization
NGO – Nongovernmental Organization (includes both INGO and NNGO)
NNGO – National Nongovernmental Organization
NSAG – Non-State Armed Group
SMT – Security Management Team[4]
SRA – Security Risk Assessment
SRM – Security Risk Management[5]
ROE – Rules of Engagement
UN – United Nations
UNDSS – United Nations Department of Safety and Security[6]
UN OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSMS – United Nations Security Management System[7]

[1] IASC, Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-non-binding-guidelines-use-armed-escorts-humanitarian-convoys
[2] UNOCHA, UN-CMCoord Field Handbook, Version 2.0, 2018. emergency.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UN%20Civil%20Military%20Coordination%20Handbook%202018.pdf
[3] Ibid.
[4] UNDSS, Security Policy Manual: United Nations Security Management System, 2024. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4059644?v=pdf
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

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Executive Summary

In complex emergencies, humanitarian convoys play a critical role in delivering necessary life-saving aid to vulnerable populations. However, in many crises, the safe passage of these convoys is jeopardized by both violence and criminality. To mitigate these security risks, in certain contexts, humanitarian organizations have resorted to using armed escorts (AE) for humanitarian convoys, provided by various armed actors.

In 2013, to regulate this practice, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) adopted the Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys. A key emphasis of these guidelines, among other considerations, is the principle of last resort. More than a decade later, however, there is still a lack of data on the contexts where AE are being used, which actors are using them, and why. To better understand the use of AE and support measures that provide consistency to this practice, Brown University, in support of and in collaboration with UN OCHA's Civil Military Coordination Service, designed and conducted a study on the current practice of the use of AE for humanitarian convoys in complex emergencies worldwide.

As no publicly available database exists on the use of AE by humanitarian convoys globally, we utilized three different methods to estimate the proportion of contexts in which AE were being used for humanitarian convoys, the types of humanitarian actors who were using them, and the reasons for their use. These methods included a cross sectional survey of humanitarian providers working in complex emergencies globally, an artificial intelligence (AI) guided review of media reports and other publicly available data mentioning the use of AE in specific contexts, and qualitative interviews with humanitarian key informants in specific humanitarian contexts. Each of these methods has its limitations, as discussed in detail in this report, though together they provide a reasonable approximation of current humanitarian practice around the use of AE. Importantly, this research only provides a snapshot in time. Further research is needed to understand trends in the use of AE over time, and especially how they can be best phased out once they are no longer needed.

The research presented in this report found that as of late 2024, AE were used in about two-thirds of the 32 humanitarian contexts for which data was available (see report below for detail), with UN agencies being more likely to use AE than NGOs. In about a third of cases, the use of AE was required by local authorities, and in over 80% of cases where AE was used, the provider was a party to the ongoing conflict. The use of both armed escorts and alternatives to armed escorts was discussed by organizations in a number of forums, with the HCT being the most common.

Qualitative interviews provided greater detail on humanitarian decision making for AE use, the benefits and challenges to their use, and some of the indirect consequences of their use on both humanitarian operations and local communities. In particular, it was noted that humanitarian organizations provided financial incentives to their armed escorts, either directly or indirectly, in the majority of settings where they were used. This financialization of AE contributes to the development of a security economy that leads to the entrenchment of AE use in those settings.

The report concludes with a summary of remaining gaps in knowledge and areas for future inquiry. This includes the need for more regular data collection on the use of AE to evaluate trends over time, disaggregating data by type of context, criticality of activity, and type of actor, and collecting data from a broader array of stakeholders, such as donors, local governments, and community members. Finally, more systematic information sharing is needed on best practices for phasing out the use of AE in settings where they are no longer needed, especially in contexts where they have been used for many years.

Background

Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys

Humanitarian organizations often operate in highly volatile and insecure environments, where the presence of armed actors, political instability, and criminality pose significant risks to their employees and the delivery of aid. In such high-risk zones, the decision to use AE typically occurs when humanitarian operations become unsafe (or are perceived to be unsafe) due to the threat of attacks, looting, or ransom abductions. In these circumstances, AEs may be considered by either humanitarian organizations, or imposed by the de facto authorities, as a security mitigation measure that allows business continuity. The ultimate goal is the safe passage of aid to populations in dire need, while maintaining the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets.[8]

Historically, the use of AE became more prominent in the 1990s as complex humanitarian emergencies, such as the civil war in Somalia, emerged, where aid workers faced hostile armed actors. As a response, peacekeeping forces were asked to protect humanitarian convoys. Similar strategies were deployed in other settings where aid workers and commodities faced substantial threats.[9] The use of AE aimed to deter potential attacks and enable the safe distribution of aid to populations in need.

However, the use of AE has raised several ethical and operational concerns. Humanitarian principles, and thus the organizations themselves, emphasize neutrality, impartiality, and independence. The presence of armed security risks blurring the lines between humanitarian aid and security entities, compromising the principles. Further, a reliance on military protection can even perpetuate violence by leading to aid convoys being perceived as military targets. As a result, the decision to use AE is always a complex one, involving careful consideration of the safety of humanitarian workers, the needs and protection of the local population, and the broader impact on the perception of both humanitarian operations and humanitarian principles in the short and long term.[10,11]

Despite the importance and complexity of decision making around the use of AE in complex emergencies, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of their

[8] IASC, Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-non-binding-guidelines-use-armed-escorts-humanitarian-convoys
[9] Plowright, W., "Humanitarianism's Thin Red Line: Armed Escorts in Theory and Practice," Journal of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024.
[10] Bassil, A., "Armed escorts to humanitarian convoys: An unexplored framework under international humanitarian law," International Review of the Red Cross No. 914, December 2021.
[11] IASC, Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-non-binding-guidelines-use-armed-escorts-humanitarian-convoys

current usage. Much of the research on humanitarian aid focuses on specific operational challenges, delivery outcomes, or ethical considerations. However, the particular dynamics or consequences of using AE are significantly less well-documented. Data on how often these escorts are deployed, in what crises, and specific information on the experience is limited. This lack of comprehensive analysis leaves critical questions unanswered and significant holes in stakeholders' knowledge, hindering efforts to develop the best practices for safely delivering aid while upholding humanitarian principles.

Relevant International Guidelines

Two primary sets of guidelines govern the use of AE in humanitarian operations:

1. 1995 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Report on the Use of Armed Protection for Humanitarian Assistance

2. 2013 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys

1995 ICRC Report

The ICRC report is geared towards the mandate of Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, but many of its principles and guidelines are echoed in the later IASC guidelines.[12] Written amid heightened post-Cold War violence, the report cites more than 31 complex armed conflicts characterized by the "disappearance of any form of authority… the denial of basic human values and increasing chaos and anarchy," making humanitarian work increasingly dangerous.[13] Specifically, as "the emblem of the Red Cross and Red Crescent no longer always provides the necessary protection" during humanitarian action, the report notes an imperative to understand alternative security solutions.[14] Still, it maintains that the greatest form of security for a humanitarian organization is its ethical conduct, at the center of which are the guiding principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.[15]

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[12] IASC, Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-non-binding-guidelines-use-armed-escorts-humanitarian-convoys

[13] ICRC, "Report on the use of armed protection for humanitarian assistance," extracted from 'Working Paper, Council of delegates, 1995,' presented at the ICRC and International Federation, Council of delegates, Geneva, 1-2 December 1995. Available at: web.archive.org/web/20230202102332/https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/report/57jneg.htm

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

These principles are the foundation of humanitarian work, and thus the basis for armed escort policy. The ICRC report finds that "any armed protection for any component of the Movement is in conflict" with these principles and therefore "As a rule, the different components of the Movement should not use armed protection or deterrent force… [including] armed escorts."[16] Furthermore, any decision to use AE affects the overall security context and the future provision of aid, necessitating standardized guidelines on their use.[17]

The report proceeds to outline the minimum requirements for the use of AE. Notable among these requirements is that the escort should be "considered primarily for its deterrent value and not for its fire-power."[18] Additionally, escorts must be "intended to provide protection against bandits and common criminals" and "there should be no risk of confrontation between the escort and the actual parties to the conflict."[19] Only private security forces, local police, or military personnel are allowed to provide the armed escort and they must always travel in separate vehicles unmarked by the Red Cross or Red Crescent emblems.[20] Finally, the report specifies that actors should not use UN peacekeeping forces as armed protection when they could be perceived to be party to the conflict.[21]

Although no longer the primary reference for armed escort policy, the principles of the ICRC report remain foundational for understanding current practices.

2013 IASC Non-Binding Guidelines

In 2001, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) developed non-binding guidelines for the use of AE both within and outside the UN system. These guidelines note a mid-twentieth century transition from conflict between 'regular' (State) forces to majority 'irregular' warfare, such as intrastate wars, uprisings, and insurgencies.[22] Referencing the 1995 ICRC document, the guidelines contend that as a result of this transition, humanitarians' role within conflicts and the perception of their work have also shifted, warranting further security considerations.[23]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] IASC, "Guidelines: Use of Military or Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys," September 2001, available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-03/IASC%20Discussion%20Paper%20and%20Non-Binding%20Guidelines%20on%20the%20Use%20of%20Military%20or%20Armed%20Escorts%20for%20Humanitarian%20Convoys.pdf
[23] Ibid, page 5.

The current 2013 IASC non-binding guidelines are an updated version of these 2001 guidelines, drafted after additional consultation with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and various humanitarian organizations.[24] The overarching principle of these guidelines "is that armed escorts should be used only as a last resort, in exceptional cases, and then only when a set of key criteria is fulfilled."[25] The report has two sections: (1) if and when to use AE, including the consequences of their use, alternative means of ensuring the safe delivery of assistance, and the necessary criteria for their exceptional use; and (2) how to use AE, containing guiding principles, practical directions, and recommendations for discontinuation plans.

All alternative methods of ensuring safe humanitarian access must be employed before an organization turns to AE. The report outlines examples of these methods, featuring a non-exhaustive list:[26]

- Cultivate greater acceptance among local communities and members of the conflict
- Hold active humanitarian negotiation with all relevant actors
- Move to remote management: withdraw at-risk staff and transfer programmatic responsibility to local staff and partner organizations
- Implement a low-visibility approach
- Request area security
- Shift program designs to reduce the frequency of field visits
- Suspend or terminate operations in the area

If all alternatives have been considered and are insufficient, the IASC guidelines lay out minimum criteria to be met before utilizing AE, including:[27]

- A level of humanitarian need where the absence of humanitarian intervention would result in "unacceptable human suffering" and AE are imperative to this intervention[28]
- The responsible authorities cannot or will not permit humanitarian action without the use of AE
- AE provide a necessary deterrent to increase the safety and security of humanitarian staff and aid recipients
- The use of escorts will not "irreversibly compromise" the security of the area or the continuation of humanitarian operations[29]

[24] IASC, Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-non-binding-guidelines-use-armed-escorts-humanitarian-convoys
[25] Ibid, page 1.
[26] Ibid, pages 5-6.
[27] Ibid, pages 6-11.
[28] Ibid, page 6.
[29] Ibid.

The remainder of the guidelines focus on best practices when using AE, among which a plan for the discontinuation of use is paramount. The specific purpose and time frame of the escort should be agreed upon from the beginning; if this time period exceeds 30 days, there should be a system in place to regularly reevaluate the necessity of the escort.[30] Lastly, the IASC guidelines include a detailed flow chart to guide practitioners through the decision to engage an armed escort, referencing relevant sections of the document as necessary.

Methods

Specific Aims

UN OCHA has asserted that the humanitarian community lacks comprehensive and recent data on the current practice around the use of AE for humanitarian convoys. No database exists that can provide an overview of where AE are used, in how many contexts, and under which circumstances. Members of the UN-CMCoord Consultative Group flagged this as an impediment to their ability to ensure consistency in their approaches to the use of AE across all humanitarian operations. This research was designed to fill this information gap by addressing these major aims:

Aim 1: Collect baseline data on the use of AE for humanitarian convoys in selected humanitarian contexts.

Aim 2: Collect baseline data on the main users of AE by type of organization.

Aim 3: Collect baseline data on the type of AE providers and contractual arrangements existing with these providers.

Aim 4: Understand the main considerations taken by Humanitarian Country Teams, UN Agencies, and NGOs before and/or when using AE.

Research Scope

The research project looked at the provision of AE for humanitarian convoys as defined in the 2013 *IASC Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys*. The following terms were taken as core definitions to limit the research scope:

[30] Ibid, page 14.

- **Armed Escort:** a security measure that serves as a visible deterrent to a potential attack and, if necessary, acts in self-defense against an attack. AE can be provided by military as well as non-military actors, such as police, private security companies or non-State actors.[31]

- **Humanitarian Convoy:** the movement of humanitarian supplies, goods and assets, including humanitarian personnel, by land between fixed locations. A convoy consists of at least one vehicle plus an escort, meaning two or more vehicles traveling together.[32]

Excluded from the research scope was the provision of security escorts to static locations or to private contractors dealing with humanitarian supplies.

The research presented in this study was limited to humanitarian organizations that are part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee System, and/or the humanitarian architecture in-country, and thus are represented in the Humanitarian Country Team and the Security Management Team in-country.

Research Context

Contexts were selected for inclusion if they met both of the following predetermined criteria: 1) OCHA had an established presence, and 2) there was an established Humanitarian Country Team.

- **Asia & the Pacific:** Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, DPRK.
- **Europe:** Ukraine.
- **MENA:** Syria, North-West Syria,[33] Lebanon, OpT, Yemen, Libya, Iraq.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Venezuela.
- **Southern and Eastern Africa:** Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Abyei Area.[34]
- **West and Central Africa:** Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Mali, Niger, Nigeria.

[31] Ibid, page 3.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Refers to parts of Idleb and Aleppo provinces that were under the control of Syrian opposition forces prior to December 2024.
[34] Refers to a contested area between South Sudan and Sudan that has been accorded special administrative status by the 2004 Protocol on the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict.

Data Collection

A mixed-method approach was applied in order to allow for triangulation between different data types. This included 3 primary sources of data: 1) Cross Sectional Survey; 2) Key Informant Interviews; and 3) an Artificial Intelligence (AI) guided review of online sources. Data collection occurred between July and December 2024.

Cross Sectional Survey

A cross sectional survey (delivered to each respondent just once) was conducted between July and December 2024. The survey included 15 multiple-choice questions regarding the current use of AE by humanitarian actors in their contexts (see survey in appendix below). The questions were developed initially in English by the Brown University research team based on gaps in knowledge about the use of AE. The survey was then revised based on a series of discussions with UN OCHA staff and its Civil-Military Advisory Group (CMAG) members to ensure they were fit for purpose. Once finalized, the survey was translated into French, Spanish and Arabic. The survey, available in the four languages, was administered online by OCHA using a secure Microsoft platform and adhering to strict privacy and confidentiality standards.

Respondents were reached through UN OCHA and CMAG member organizations, who offered to share the survey with their networks to ensure diversity in the group of humanitarian respondents, including both UN and NGO[35] representatives. This data collection method, often referred to as “snowball sampling” in the qualitative literature, is used in research where there is no formal list of potential study subjects from which participants can be selected randomly or consecutively. The study team aimed to include an average of two respondents per context, including one OCHA and one non-OCHA respondent per context, by continuing survey data collection until this was achieved in each context or determined to be difficult to achieve.

Survey results were summarized using descriptive statistics, including percentages for multiple choice responses and graphical representations of the data. Unfortunately, due to the small sample size additional inferential statistics (such as regression or correlation analyses) or subgroup analyses (providing results only for specific contexts or classes of actors) were not possible with this data set.

Key Informant Interviews

The interview protocol consisted of semi-structured, open-ended response questions that mirrored the themes included in the survey above but allowed for greater flexibility in response (see interview protocol in appendix below). The interview protocol was

[35] Note that for the purpose of this research study, NGO refers to all non-governmental civil society organizations, including both International NGOs (INGOs) and National NGOs (NNGOs).

structured around 15 predetermined themes in order to allow for a rapid framework matrix analysis of the results. Similar to the survey above, the questions were initially developed by Brown University research staff and then revised based on discussions with UN OCHA staff and CMAG members. The questions were designed to provide qualitative depth, allowing participants to elaborate on their unique experiences and provide nuanced perspectives on the use (or lack of use) of AE for humanitarian convoys, thereby complementing the quantitative data above with rich, contextual narrative insights (see appendix for interview instrument).

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted virtually by Brown University research staff in English using a secure electronic platform between July and December 2024. Participants were asked for their verbal consent prior to participation. Participants were informed that their confidentiality would be maintained and that no personal or organizational identifiers would be included in any resulting publications.

Similar to the process described above for survey respondents, key informants for the interviews were recruited through UN OCHA and CMAG member organizations, who offered to help recruit additional key informants from their networks to ensure diversity in the group of humanitarian respondents (including both UN and NGO representatives). There was no fixed number of interviews planned, but rather they continued until saturation was reached (i.e. no new information was being obtained from interviewees).

Qualitative data was analyzed using a framework matrix approach by theme using standard methods for qualitative research.[36,37] All interview recordings were transcribed in full. Four separate research staff members reviewed the transcripts and then coded them into the 15 separate themes that were chosen *a priori* by the research team (see annex below). A simple excel matrix was utilized to conduct the framework matrix analysis. Double coding by research staff was utilized to minimize bias. Research staff then wrote up summary memos for each theme, incorporating the consensus of the qualitative interview data across participants, divided by type of actor (i.e. UN vs NGO informants).

[36] Gale, N.K., Heath, G., Cameron, E. *et al.* Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Med Res Methodol* **13**, 117 (2013). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117

[37] Srivastava, Aashish and Thomson, Stanley, Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research (2 Jan, 2009). 4 Journal of Administration and Governance 72 (2009), Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2760705

AI Guided Review of Online Sources

Given the inherent limitations in reaching a representative sample of humanitarian responders in the various contexts studied, the surveys and key informant interviews were complemented by an AI guided internet search of peer-reviewed publications, non-peer-reviewed reports, and local and international media articles regarding the use (or non-use) of AE in each of the contexts listed above. The AI guided review produced hundreds of online sources that included examples of AE use (or non-use) in the specific contexts noted above. All information produced by the AI guided search was verified by research staff through identification and review of original online source documentation in order to avoid potentially inaccurate information or "hallucinations." While not referenced here, these online sources can be made available upon request to the report authors.

Data on whether or not AEs were being used in each of the contexts above, and which organizations were using AEs, was extracted from the original source documentation by research staff between July and December 2024. Because of the heterogeneity of these sources, we were not able to extract additional data, such as on the reasons for AE use or alternative considerations to AE use from the AI Guided Review. This information is provided by the quantitative survey and qualitative key informant interviews discussed above.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain the confidentiality of participants, original recordings or transcripts will not be shared, but de-identified memos and surveys are available on request for outside review. The data is jointly owned by UN OCHA and Brown University. The methods, results and recommendations of the report follow strict academic rigor and adhere to the Declaration of Helsinki regarding ethics in human subjects' research.

Findings

Data Overview

A total of 54 surveys, 25 key informant interviews, and 28 AI guided internet searches were completed in the humanitarian contexts included in this research study. Of the 36 humanitarian contexts noted in the methods section above, at least one source of data was available in 32 of the contexts (89%). Four contexts (Burundi, DPRK, El Salvador & Malawi) are missing all three data types. Three additional locations (Eritrea, Honduras, and Madagascar) have survey and/or interview data available but lack AI guided review data. Lebanon has AI guided review data but lacks both survey and interview data.

Of the 54 survey participants, 32 were from UN agencies and 22 were from NGOs. Of the 25 key informant interview participants, 13 were from UN agencies and 12 were from NGOs. Importantly, the vast majority of survey respondents and key informants from NGOs were from INGOs (usually based in their local country office), though 1-2 of the survey respondents and key informants were from NNGOs.

Analysis Process

Survey Data Analysis: If a country has multiple records and at least one record is "Yes," the context is recorded as "Yes."

Interview Data Analysis: If the interview data contradicts the survey data for a specific individual's response, the interview data takes precedence.

Comparison: Finally, the consistency between the survey/interview data and the AI guided review data was compared.

The AI guided review was only able to identify reliable data on where armed escorts were being used and who was using them. Additional considerations relevant to this report, such as who was providing the AE, the alternatives considered to AE use, and humanitarian decision making around use of AE was not consistently available in a publicly accessible format online for each of the humanitarian contexts studied. As such, the quantitative information in the section below on these other topics comes solely from the surveys.

Note that the number of potential responses for each survey question varies by question. For instance, some questions are only applicable to respondents in contexts where AE are being used, so the total number of respondents (i.e. the sample size or N) will be smaller for those questions. Similarly, a question on who imposes AE will only be applicable to respondents in a context where armed escorts have been imposed. Some questions allow more than one response – in these cases we have noted the number of responses as opposed to the number of respondents, with the number of responses higher in these cases than the total number of respondents.

Quantitative Results

Current use of armed escorts by context

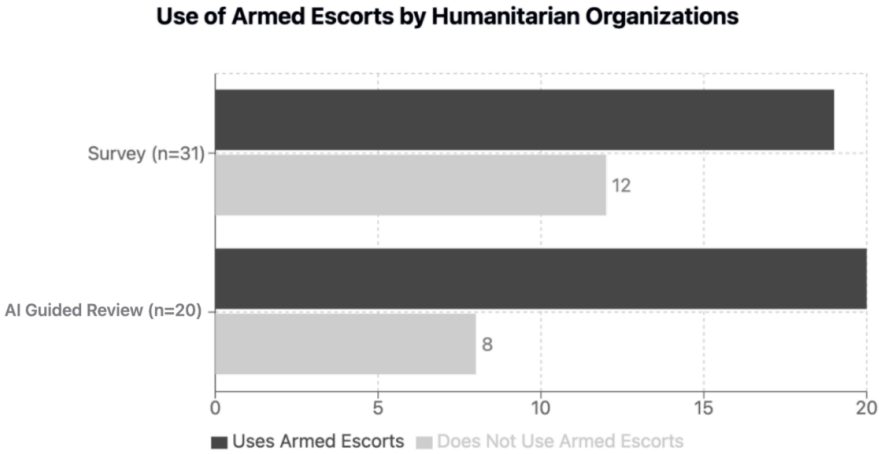
Survey

A total of 31 contexts (n=31) with survey data (excluding Burundi, DPRK, El Salvador, Malawi, and Lebanon) were analyzed. Among them, 19 countries responded "Yes" (61%). The remaining 12 countries responded "No" (39%).

AI Guided Review

A total of 28 contexts (n=28) with AI guided review data (excluding Burundi, DPRK, El Salvador, Malawi, Abyei Area, Eritrea, Honduras, and Madagascar) were analyzed. Among them, 20 countries responded "Yes" (71%). 8 countries responded "No" (29%).

Response	Survey (n=31)	AI Review (n=28)
Yes	Abyei Area, Afghanistan, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Haiti, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, North-West Syria, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria	Afghanistan, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, Iraq, Syria
No	Burkina Faso, Colombia, Eritrea, Honduras, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia, Lebanon, Libya, and North-West Syria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Philippines

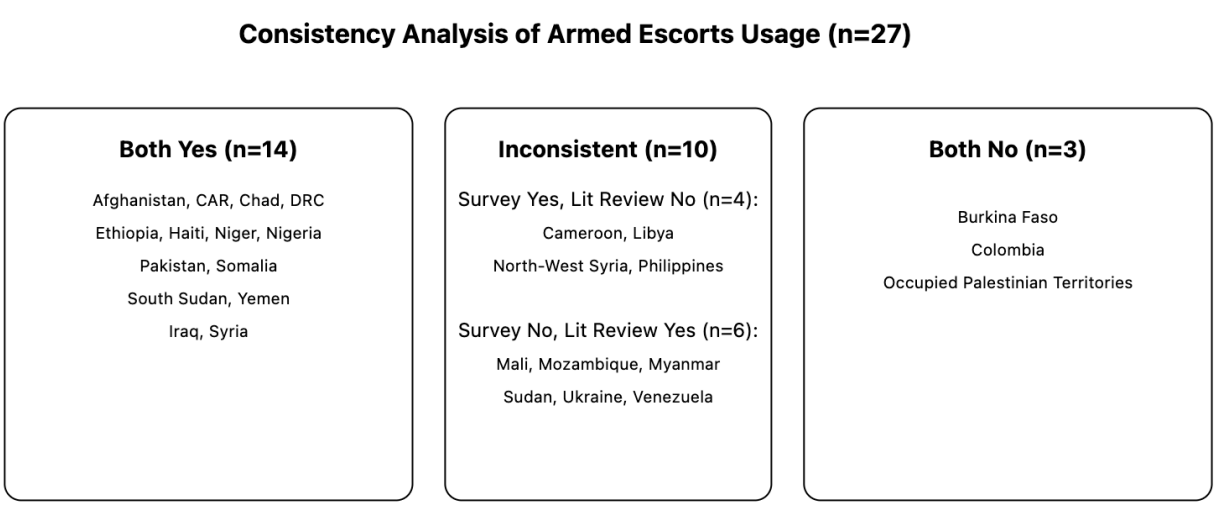


Comparison of Consistency Between Survey and AI Guided Review

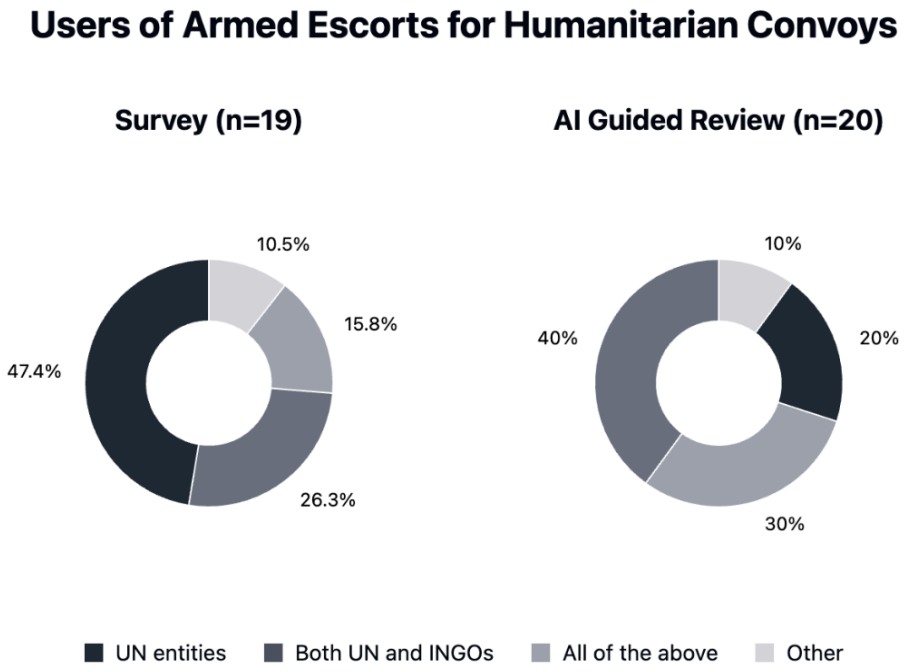
The AI review and the survey both produced data on where AE were being used and which types of humanitarian organizations were using them. In this section we review the results of the AI review and quantitative survey for these two types of data. Importantly, there is no way to know which of these two sources of information are “correct” in situations where they are inconsistent, and we might assume that the “truth” lies somewhere in between.

A total of 27 countries (n=27) with both survey and AI review data (excluding Abyei Area, Eritrea, Honduras, Madagascar, and Lebanon), were analyzed. Among these, 17 countries showed consistency between survey and AI guided review data. Out of these 17 consistent countries, 14 responded "Yes" in both survey and AI guided review data. 3 countries responded "No" in both datasets.

Additionally, there are 10 countries where the survey and AI guided review data are inconsistent. Among these, 4 countries have "Yes" in the survey but "No" in the AI guided review while 6 countries have "No" in the survey but "Yes" in the AI guided review.



Across both the surveys and AI guided review, UN entities were more likely to use AE than INGOs, who in turn were more likely to use AE than NNGOs. In fact, there were no contexts in either the survey or AI guided review where INGOs or NNGOs used AE but UN agencies did not. However, based on the survey data, in up to half of contexts where AE were used, they were used only by UN agencies and not INGOs/NNGOs. Of note, the AI guided review did capture more contexts in which INGOs and NNGOs used AE compared to the survey data, though there were still about 20% of contexts where the UN was the only user of AE.



Frequency of Armed Escort Usage by Humanitarian Actors

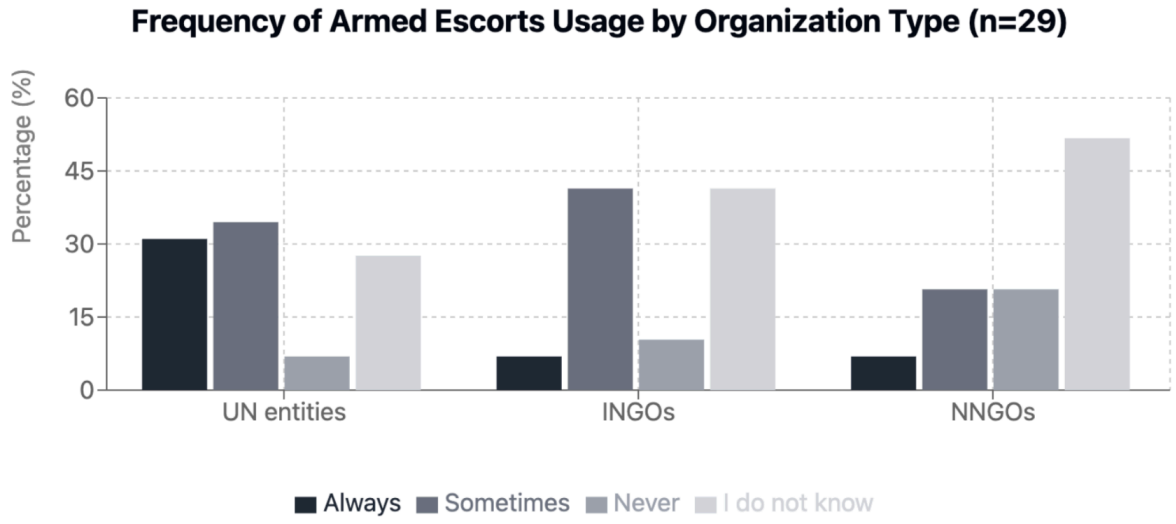
As important as the number of contexts in which AE are being used is the frequency of use in each of those contexts. In some contexts, AE were used 100% of the time, whereas in other contexts, they were used only in certain parts of the country or for certain activities (though data was not collected on which region of each country or for which specific activities AE were used).

About one-third (31%) of the 29 survey participants based in settings where AE were used reported that UN entities always used AE, while a slightly higher percentage (34%) indicated that they only sometimes used AE. Only 7% reported that AE were never used by UN entities, and 28% were unsure.

Frequency of AE use by INGOs appeared to be lower than for UN agencies. Only 7% of respondents indicated INGOs always using AE, whereas 41% reported INGOs sometimes using AE, and 10 % said INGOs never used AE. 41 % of respondents were unsure, a much higher proportion than for UN agencies and indicated a general knowledge gap at the country level regarding INGO practices with regard to use of AE.

Frequency of AE use by NNGOs was somewhat lower than for INGOs, though with a similarly high level of uncertainty. Overall, 7% of survey respondents reported NNGOs in their context always using AE, 21% reported NNGOs sometimes using AE, 21% said

NNGOs never used AE, and 42% of respondents were unsure. These results suggest a considerable diversity of practice in the use of AE among different types of humanitarian organizations.

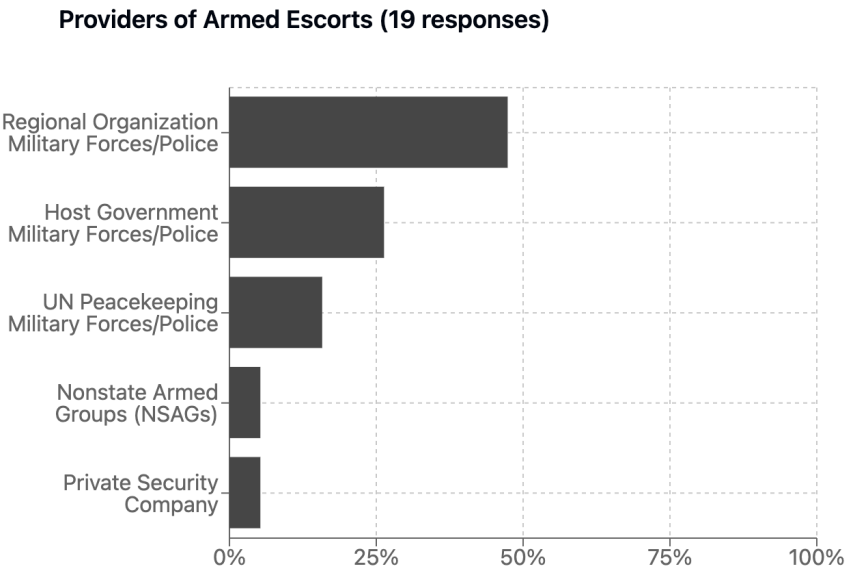


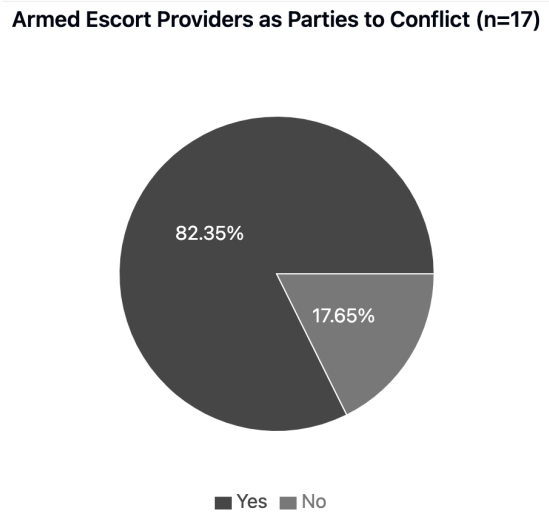
Providers of Armed Escorts

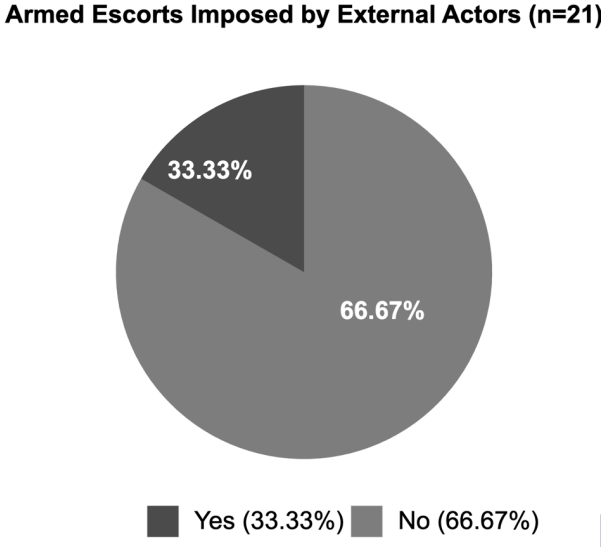
Respondents identified a range of armed escort providers. Regional organization military forces or police were the most commonly cited provider (47%), followed by host government military forces/police (26%), and UN peacekeeping forces (15%). Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and private security companies were rarely identified as providers of AE (each at 5%). This distribution suggests that state authorities or international organizations are the main sources for armed escort provision, with minimal reliance on private or non-state actors.

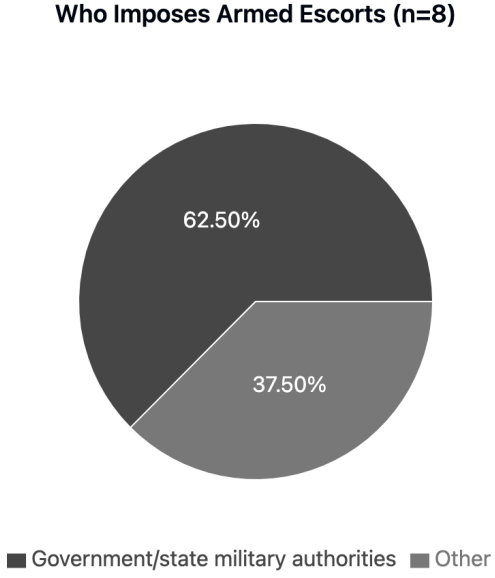
A concerning finding is that the vast majority (82%) of respondents indicated that armed escort providers are parties to the conflict and/or regularly engaged in hostilities. Only 17% reported that providers were not conflict parties. This raises significant concerns about humanitarian principles, particularly neutrality and independence, as using escorts provided by parties to a conflict can compromise these principles and potentially affect humanitarian access, perception, and acceptance.

Interestingly, in the settings where AE were used by humanitarian actors, in one third of settings were those AE imposed on humanitarians by external actors. Among those who reported imposition (N=7), the majority (63%) identified government or state military authorities as the external actor imposing armed escort use. The remainder cited "other" actors.









Humanitarian Coordination around the Use of Armed Escorts

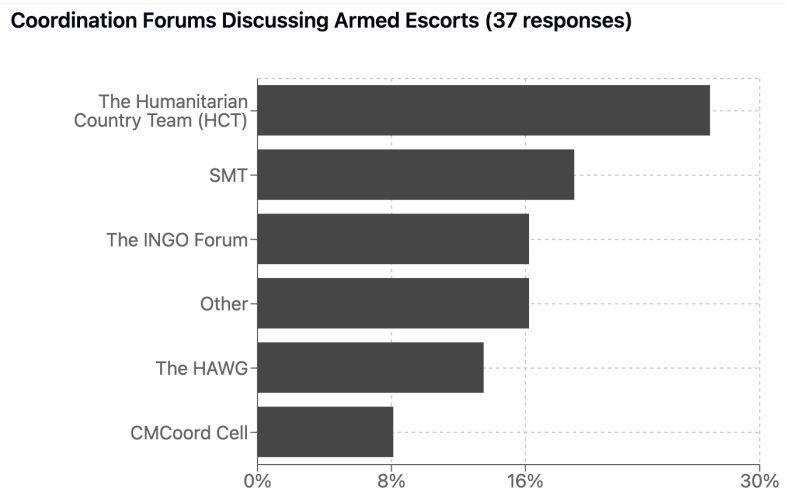
When asked to select all applicable responses from a list of potential forums where the use of AE was discussed, respondents selected a variety of different forums. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) was the most frequently mentioned (27%), followed

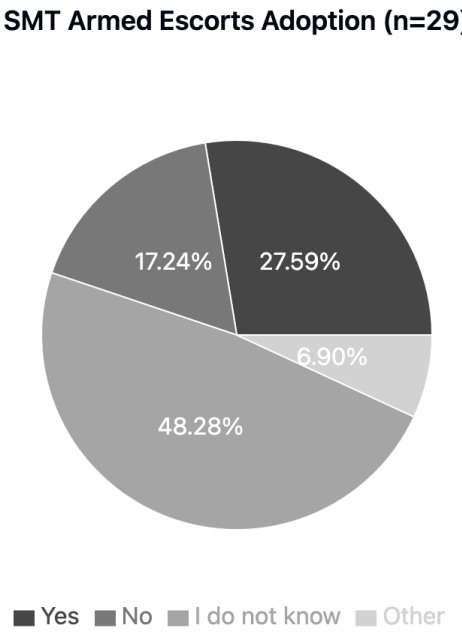
by the Security Management Team (SMT) (19%), the INGO Forum (16%), and other forums (16%). Only a minority mentioned the HAWG (14%) and UN-CMCoord Cells (8%).

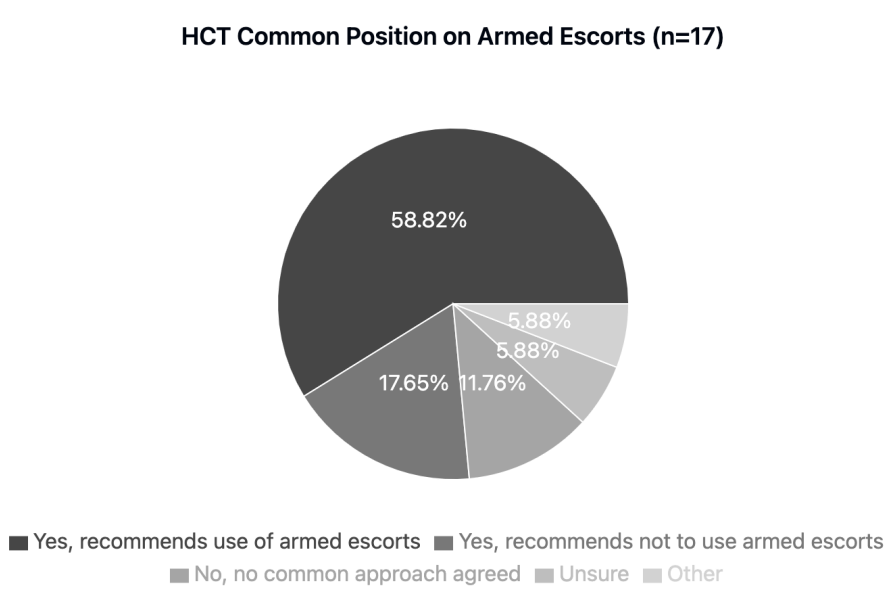
Nearly half of respondents (48%) indicated they did not know if the SMT had adopted AE as a security measure, suggesting either limited communication about SMT decisions or respondents' potential lack of involvement in security management discussions. 28% of respondents confirmed that the SMT had adopted AE as a security measure, while 17% reported that SMTs had not adopted AE as a security measure.

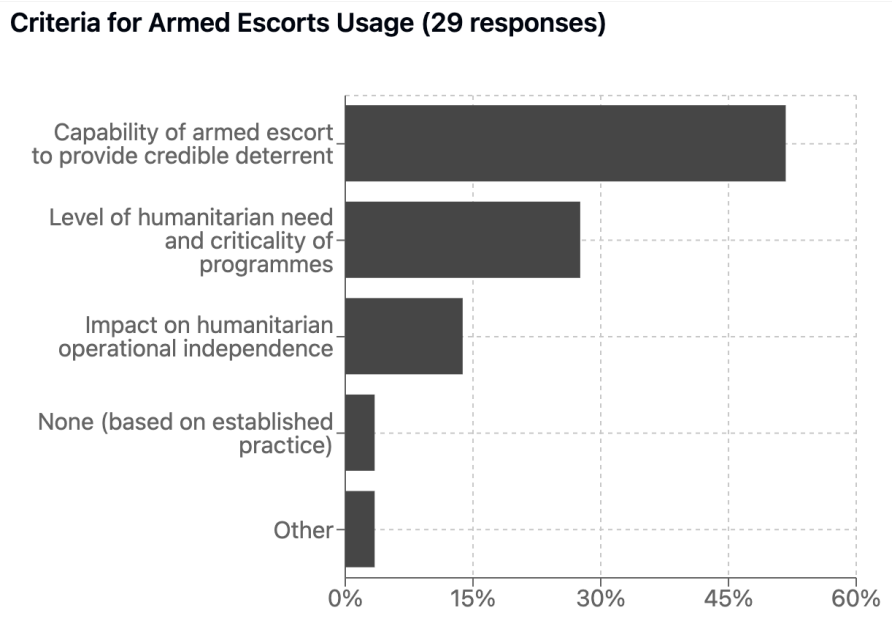
The majority of respondents (59%) indicated that their HCT recommends the use of AE for humanitarian convoys, showing a clear trend toward endorsement of this practice. A smaller proportion (18%) reported that their HCT recommends against using AE. Only 12% stated that despite discussions, no common approach was agreed upon. The remaining responses were split between "unsure" (6%) and "other" (6%). This suggests that in contexts where AE are used, HCTs have generally established clear positions, predominantly supporting their use.

When asked to select all applicable responses from a list of considerations for the use of AE, the capability of the armed escort to provide a credible deterrent in each specific context was selected by a majority of respondents (52%). The level of humanitarian need and criticality of programs being implemented was the second most selected factor (28%). Impact on humanitarian operational independence was considered by only 14% of respondents. Only 3% indicated that decisions were based on established past practices without any other specific considerations.



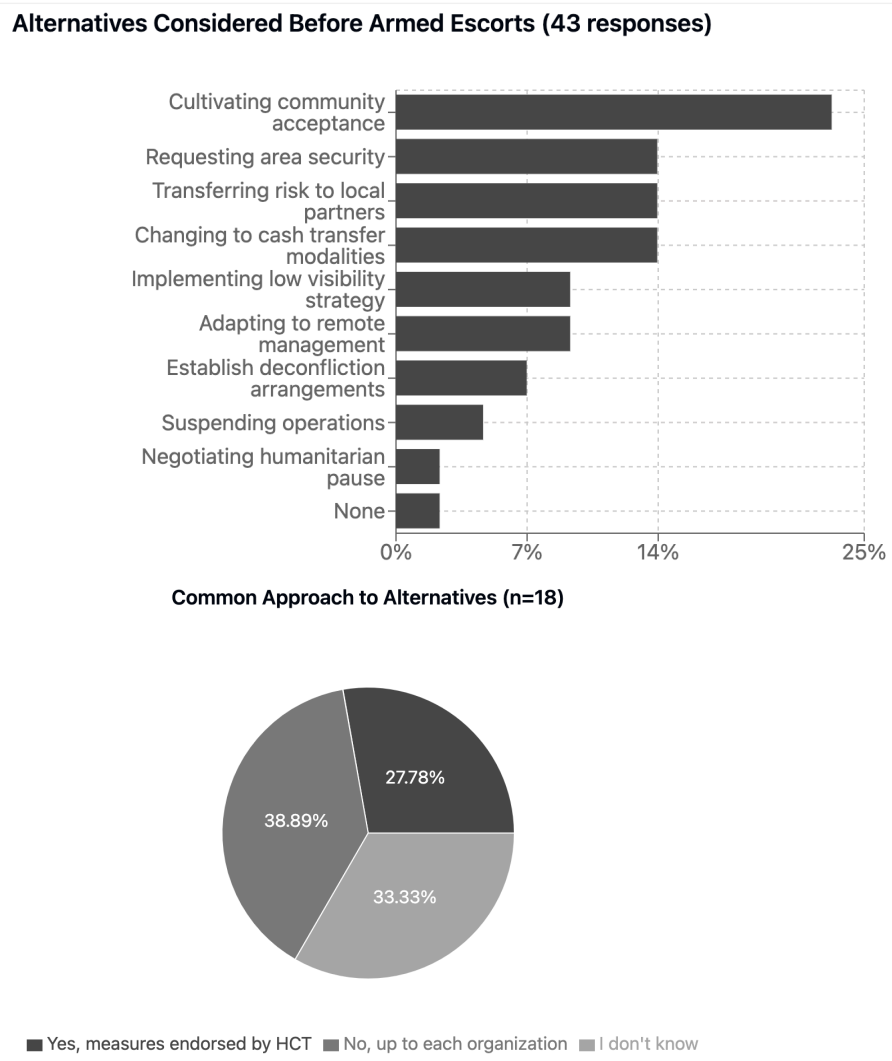

SMT Armed Escorts Adoption (n=29)
17.24%
27.59%
6.90%
48.28%
Yes
No
I do not know
Other


HCT Common Position on Armed Escorts (n=17)
58.82%
5.88%
5.88%
17.65%
11.76%
Yes, recommends use of armed escorts
Yes, recommends not to use armed escorts
No, no common approach agreed
Unsure
Other


Criteria for Armed Escorts Usage (29 responses)
Capability of armed escort to provide credible deterrent
Level of humanitarian need and criticality of programmes
Impact on humanitarian operational independence
None (based on established practice)
Other
0%
15%
30%
45%
60%

Alternatives to Armed Escorts

When asked to select all applicable responses from a list of alternatives to the use of AE, cultivating greater acceptance amongst communities and local actors was the most frequently considered alternative (23%). Three approaches tied for second place at 14% each: requesting area security instead of an escort, transferring risk to local partners,[38] and changing implementation modalities to alternatives like cash transfer. Less common alternatives included implementing a low visibility strategy (9%), adapting programs to remote management modalities (9%), establishing deconfliction arrangements (7%), suspending operations (5%), and negotiating humanitarian pauses (2%). Only 2% reported that no alternatives were considered.



[38] While the language used in the IASC guidelines is "transferring responsibilities to local partners," at the time of drafting of the survey used in this study, CMAG members recommended using the wording "transferring risk to local partners" instead to reflect on the realities of the field despite the negative implications of using this strategy.

Qualitative Results

A total of 25 key informant interviews were conducted with UN and NGO staff. Key informants were based in the following humanitarian contexts: Afghanistan, Chad, Haiti, Nigeria, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Mali, Venezuela, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Myanmar, Colombia, and Iraq. Qualitative analysis on the content of those 25 interviews was grouped into the following 15 themes, which were chosen *a priori* for analysis as described in the methods section above:

1. Humanitarian Access Challenges and Mitigation
2. Reasons for Using and Not Using Armed Escorts
3. Pay and Remuneration for Armed Escorts
4. Coordination Around the Use of Armed Escorts
5. Divergent Use of Armed Escorts by Different Actors
6. Challenges and Benefits to Use of Armed Escorts
7. Alternative Approaches to Use of Armed Escorts
8. IASC Non-Binding Guidance Consideration
9. Triggers for Review of Armed Escort Use
10. Discontinuation of Armed Escort Use
11. Capabilities and Performance of Armed Escorts
12. Indirect Impact of Armed Escorts on Convoys and Civilians
13. Armed Escort Use of Force
14. Rules of Engagement
15. Erosion of Humanitarian Principles

Note that all of the information in this section represents a summary of the data collected from the 25 key informants interviewed for this research. As is standard practice for the presentation of findings from qualitative research, this section does not attempt to “fact check” respondents. Unless otherwise noted, it should be assumed that the opinions of key informants are theirs alone, and do not represent the opinions of their organization, local government or communities, or the authors of this study. As is also typical for the presentation of qualitative research, all findings here were noted by multiple respondents, but not necessarily the majority or all respondents, unless otherwise specified. Illustrative quotes, which clearly belong to a single respondent, are provided, but only to illustrate points that have been made by multiple respondents. Unlike in quantitative research, precise numbers or proportions of key informants who agreed with a particular point are not provided, as this would suggest a level of precision that is simply not available with qualitative data.

Humanitarian Access Challenges and Mitigation

Access challenges for humanitarian organizations arise from bureaucratic, security, political, and logistical constraints. A common obstacle is bureaucratic impediments, including lengthy and complex bureaucratic processes, lack of human and material resources to manage these processes, and, in some cases, blanket refusal of travel permits. These barriers often delay operations and restrict mobility, particularly for international staff, who face different regulations from local personnel.

Security threats are also important challenges to humanitarian access, including crime, the targeting of humanitarian vehicles and aid deliveries, and the presence of armed groups. The presence of landmines in some contexts also poses a significant threat to staff and civilians alike. The combination of these factors sometimes contributes to an environment of unpredictability, where movement is restricted, and staff face threats of violence, abduction, or detention. Physical infrastructure limitations, including roadblocks, destroyed transport routes, and extreme weather conditions, further restrict operational reach.

Natural disasters and climate-related disruptions compound these difficulties, particularly when floods or droughts make certain areas inaccessible. In some cases, logistical challenges compound access difficulties, including inadequate sea or land routes, transport blockages, and security checkpoints controlled by non-state actors. Political tensions, such as election-related violence or government instability, also shape the level of access that humanitarian actors can secure.

Humanitarian organizations employ various strategies to navigate these access barriers, including negotiation, adaptation, and security coordination. Negotiation and relationship-building are primary tools, with organizations emphasizing that they engage with authorities, consult communities, and maintain relationships with security actors to gain access to specific areas. There is a reliance on local networks, as communication with local leaders is crucial for aid worker security. This relationship-building also helps mitigate operational disruptions.

Adapting programs to local constraints has also proven necessary, particularly for NGOs facing gender-based restrictions. One organization reported still hiring women even when banned, by working through intermediary actors. Other mitigation measures include adjusting working hours or modifying their activities based on safety considerations.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Security risk assessments and monitoring play a key role in mitigation efforts but vary across organizations. The UN follows structured procedures and reporting systems, including the notification of movements and static locations to parties of conflict, whereas NGOs mostly rely on informal but locally trusted security arrangements, leveraging community relationships to ensure safe passage.

UN agencies frequently struggle with state-imposed regulations and the bureaucracy of the UN Security Management System (UNSMS). One UN respondent noted, “We face delays due to security management systems that slow movement authorizations.” In general, UN agencies tend to prioritize formal coordination within the larger UN system, relying on structured risk assessments, procedural compliance, and established security protocols.

NGOs, particularly local ones, may have more flexible strategies but face heightened security risks due to lack of formal diplomatic protection. One NGO worker stated that NGOs refusing AE often couldn’t enter a given area at all. The NGO worker said they would attempt to negotiate access with local authorities, but that wasn’t an option in many cases unless they were willing to use AE.

Most NGOs, especially those which do not use AE, depend on community acceptance and decentralized security measures, such as collaboration with local partners and monitoring local risk factors in real-time.

Reasons for Using or Not Using Armed Escorts

Common Reasons for Using Armed Escorts

For most of the humanitarian organizations that use AE, the main reason for their use was security risk mitigation. While some of these organizations reported that AE were mandated by the government, most of them acknowledged this mandate was put into place based upon credible threats to their organizations and considered the environment to be too dangerous to operate in without AE. In one country where AE are required on certain routes, one respondent replied, “Normally, we don’t want to be a mission or operation that’s solely dependent on armed escorts…[but on the routes where AE are required] you don’t want a 40 convoy truck captured… it’s not safe for the drivers…it’s not safe for the people who are dependent on that food and those resources too. If they miss out, you have a situation where people could die.”

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Most UN agencies stated that risk mitigation of a credible threat was either their primary or secondary reason for using AE. One UN respondent replied, “In the [location deleted] region, the humanitarians are obliged to use the AE because the system is … very bad, and if you move without Armed Escorts, you might be attacked by one of the conflicting tribes. Armed Escorts [are] not just used because it is available, but only when you don't have another option.”

Most NGOs also reported using AE as a risk mitigation tool to credible threats. One NGO respondent reported “The reality of [the NGO’s] operational context is that they are not able to operate at this particular moment without Armed Escorts — if they were to wake up in the morning and say ‘no Armed Escorts,’ it would create limits on their ability to monitor activities…and conduct their own activities directly.”

Common Reasons to Not Use Armed Escorts

Almost every respondent whose organization does not use AE provided multiple reasons for why they are not using them. The three most prominent themes were that 1) organizations were able to successfully negotiate access, 2) the AE available to be used belonged to a party to the conflict, which was determined as a red line, and 3) AE should only be used as a last resort. Almost half of the respondents replied that they were able to negotiate access and therefore did not need AE. Slightly less respondents reported that the AE available for use were all parties to the ongoing conflict or stated that the AE should only be used as a last resort and their operational environment was not dire enough to be deemed as a last resort situation. One NGO respondent replied, “The most important thing that we can do is build a proper relationship with armed actors in order to be able to have [access] in their areas of influence and their areas of cooperation.”

Two other themes were equally noted by the respondents, with a third of respondents stating that the use of AE would erode their neutrality or that the use of armed escorts would have a negative impact on their acceptance by the people they were trying to support. The final theme that was mentioned by a few respondents was that using AE would increase the risk of attack for the humanitarian convoy.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

The two primary themes of the UN respondents were that the use of AE would erode humanitarian principles such as neutrality, independence, and impartiality, and the only available AE were a party to the conflict. One respondent replied, “Any provision of Armed Escorts would result in us being in very close proximity with a party to the conflict and therefore eroding the impartiality, but also the community acceptance...When

impartiality erodes, then you can easily, as a humanitarian worker, become a target as well."

The two primary themes of the NGO respondents were that their organizations were able to negotiate access and AE should only be used as a last resort. One NGO respondent replied, “The bottom line is armed escorts are a last resort, and in [location deleted] is not. It's a long, long, long, long, long way from being a last resort.”

Additional secondary themes for both UN and NGO organizations were that AE would increase risk to the convoys, erode core humanitarian principles, decrease acceptability with the population they were trying to help, and that the only AE available were party to the conflict. “We stopped using armed escorts because our proximity to what one party to the conflict perceived as a legitimate target made it dangerous for us.”

Pay and Remuneration for Armed Escorts

Overall, of the respondents that reported using AE, most reported that the AE were either paid a stipend/cash and/or were provided food, lodging, and overnight accommodations as required for overnight missions. Roughly half of the respondents reported paying cash or a daily/monthly stipend to the AE, while a few respondents reported paying for some combination of food, water, and accommodations for overnight missions. However, the views of the respondents about whether the AE should be paid differed. One respondent replied, “Of course, they are compensated, though the models vary depending on each State…monthly stipend…[or] daily escort payment.” Another respondent replied, “[Paying AE] discredits all of the work that we are doing around the negotiations and discussions we're having.”

Compounding these problems is the financialization of AE. In some regions, AE has morphed into a security marketplace, where local authorities or armed groups profit from escort services. This “security economy” pressures organizations to conform to AE norms, regardless of actual need. “AE has become an income-generating activity for security actors, influencing decisions beyond actual security concerns,” a participant noted.

Financial and bureaucratic incentives further entrench AE within the system. AE services have become economically embedded, perpetuating their use: “After 20 years, we are still using escorts because it creates an entire economy around it.” Indeed, most of the respondents whose organizations pay for AE reported that they have set a precedent and cannot stop paying their AE. One respondent replied, “We are helping support a kind of cottage industry that has developed around the use of Armed

Escorts…We have to pay every time there's a movement… It's become a systemic use, no longer the use in last resort situations, and there's a great fear to roll back from this."

Only one respondent reported that they have stopped paying their AE. This respondent replied, "It wasn't an official stopping of payments. We just phased out the practice as security improved. As military forces changed and the need for escorts decreased, we no longer had to allocate…money for them. It just stopped naturally. There was no announcement, no formal decision—just a gradual shift in operations."

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Most AE for UN organizations are paid or receive some form of remuneration. However, who pays the escorts differs from location to location. In some contexts, AE are paid for by the national government, while in other contexts the governments require the humanitarian organizations to both use and pay for AE themselves. In a few contexts where the UN determines that the level of threat requires use of AE, but the government is not able to support the use of AE, humanitarian organizations hire and pay local armed actors or private contractors.

Half of the NGO respondents that reported using AE stated that their AE are paid or receive remuneration. Some stated their AE were paid by the state while others reported directly paying. Financial constraints also remain a barrier for NGOs, many of whom simply cannot afford AE. This creates disparities in operational security between NGOs and UN agencies.

The financial and operational dependence on AE has entrenched it as a default mechanism, especially for larger organizations with more resources. Smaller organizations—especially NGOs—struggle to keep up. "The default response is to go with AE because the UN has the money to pay for them, but NGOs don't, so we're caught in the middle."

Coordination Around the Use of Armed Escorts

UN and NGO respondents often responded to this theme differently. In general, UN respondents tended to suggest that, while NGOs were usually consulted on the use of AE, they recognized the limitations of these consultations and confirmed that final decisions about the use of AE remained with the UN. NGO respondents tended to emphasize their dissatisfaction with coordination from the UN on the topic of AE. Respondents from both the UN and from NGOs also mentioned several alternative coordination channels, including various working groups, NGO consortiums, the Saving Lives Together framework, humanitarian notification systems (HNS), and safety forums.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Most UN respondents acknowledged that, while NGOs are consulted on the use of AE, the UN SMT ultimately decides whether AE will be used by the UN. As one respondent put it, “I would say informed rather than consulted.” Additionally, several respondents mentioned uncertainty about the coordination process with some respondents highlighting the complexity of involving every NGO in SMT meetings.

Most NGO respondents voiced various frustrations regarding coordination around the use of AE. Some respondents indicated that NGO participation in SMT and HCT meetings was not sufficient, with one respondent describing NGOs as “observers” that are “not supposed to talk” during these meetings. Additionally, several respondents mentioned issues with information sharing with the UN, describing it as “one-directional” and “not very detailed.” Finally, several respondents implied that a lack of trust exists between NGOs and the UN, with one participant explicitly acknowledging that coordination structures and information sharing systems are hindered because of a lack of trust between relevant actors.

Divergent Use of Armed Escorts by Different Actors

The incongruent use of AE, where some organizations use AE while others in the same area of operation do not, highlights the complex tradeoffs between security, neutrality, and access. This mixed approach to the use of AE has deep operational consequences, affecting everything from humanitarian neutrality and community perception to security risk mitigation and community access.

This inconsistent use of AE has created deep operational fragmentation, generating risks for both users and non-users alike. One of the most significant concerns is the erosion of neutrality. Organizations using AE are perceived as aligned with armed or political actors, undermining community trust. As one respondent emphasized in relation to their context, “If you push humanitarian principles, the first one [to go] is neutrality. But armed escorts are belligerent actors. By definition, you lose neutrality.”

This divergence leads to security risks on both sides: agencies that adopt AE become highly visible targets, while those who avoid it face suspicion from armed actors and local authorities. The imbalance intensifies vulnerability across the board. “When some groups don’t use armed escorts and others do, it increases the profile of those who do—making them more recognizable and more vulnerable,” one respondent explained. In some instances, the first organizations to use AE in an area are seen as breaking the status quo and, as a result, are targeted by armed groups.

Coordination issues also emerge when security protocols differ between organizations using AE and organizations not using AE. This undermines joint operational planning and creates friction. As described by one actor, “When some organizations insist on using AE while others operate without them, it affects coordination and trust among humanitarian actors.”

NGOs that refuse AE to maintain humanitarian principles often face restricted or denied access by local authorities. “They said they would negotiate access, but that wasn’t an option in many cases,” one NGO respondent said, pointing to the way local authorities might punish organizations that refuse to use AE.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

UN agencies typically operate under rigid security frameworks that require AE in high-risk zones. However, this results in credibility loss and trust erosion in certain contexts. “We are escorted by the same people who used to attack us… how can they believe me?” said one UN worker in reference to local community perceptions. The presence of AE can restrict humanitarian activities, especially those involving vulnerable groups, who may be afraid to approach when armed actors are present.

NGOs, especially national and local ones, often reject AE to uphold neutrality and community-based engagement. However, this creates a dilemma: those who opt out are often denied access, while those who opt in are financially strained and exposed to greater visibility-related risks. The dual system forces NGOs into difficult trade-offs between principled operational modalities, access, and safety.

Ultimately, the choice to use or refuse AE creates systemic inequalities in humanitarian access and effectiveness, calling for coordinated reevaluation of risk mitigation measures across the sector.

Challenges and Benefits to Use of Armed Escorts

Challenges

One major challenge to the use of AE is its unpredictability; AE can sometimes become unreliable or even contribute to insecurity. In cases where AE are or have been parties to a conflict, their presence may create more risks than they mitigate. The use of AE by humanitarian organizations may be perceived as an alignment with one or more parties to the conflict, making those organizations targets rather than protected actors. AE can also make organizations more recognizable and therefore more vulnerable to attacks. The reliability of AE is also an issue in some cases, one NGO stated, “behavioral challenges exist; some escorts refuse to go to certain areas or do not cooperate when needed”.

Reliance on AE also limits operational independence. The need to coordinate movements with escort providers affects flexibility, delaying field missions. Furthermore, the presence of AE risks damaging the neutrality of humanitarian efforts, as communities may perceive organizations as being aligned with specific factions. AE are viewed as intimidating to locals, where some refuse to speak with humanitarian workers in their presence. Humanitarian workers lose their neutrality and local trust is eroded.

The financial burden of AE is another downside, as security costs divert resources away from core humanitarian efforts. Some escorts have turned security provision into a profit-making enterprise, creating a dependency cycle that is difficult to break and influences decisions beyond security concerns.

One NGO worker commented “if we are going to make it as a routine, then I believe it’s not actually an escort anymore. It’s a convoy. It’s no longer an armed escort, it’s an armed convoy.” Another NGO worker also added “I cannot find any benefit that would outweigh the harm we are doing by using AE.”

Benefits

Despite these challenges, AE can provide essential protection in certain high-risk environments. Their presence ensures that aid reaches populations that would otherwise be inaccessible. In volatile areas, AE can safeguard humanitarian convoys, protect staff, and enable continued service delivery. Some organizations also report that AE presence reassures staff, allowing them to focus on aid distribution without constant security concerns. One UN worker noted “you can focus on your work [delivering aid] instead of looking over your shoulder constantly.”

UN vs. NGO Approaches

UN agencies often operate under security mandates requiring the use of AE in certain areas, making disengagement complex. NGOs remain divided. Some avoid AE entirely to preserve neutrality, while others reluctantly use them in extreme security conditions. While the use of AE allows for more access in some ways, it also prevents access in others. Both UN staff and NGO staff generally agreed with the premise that the use of AE should be a last resort in active conflict zones, even if that was not always reflected in their actual observations.

Alternative Approaches to Use of Armed Escorts

Most respondents from both UN and NGO organizations gave multiple options as alternatives to using AE. However, two alternatives were mentioned by a majority of respondents. The option mentioned most frequently as an alternative to garner access

without AE was investing in community engagement. One respondent replied, “So access and acceptance are the most important aspects that need to be considered…Awareness sessions are also significantly important because in many cases, attacks or aggressive actions against humanitarian workers are a result of misunderstanding.” The second most recommended option was accurate stakeholder mapping, which was considered critical to enabling negotiations for community access.

Other alternatives included using area security, low profile tactics, armored vehicles, improved security management, local capacity building, better NGO to NGO coordination, and suspending aid deliveries.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Most UN respondents replied that the best alternative to AE was either community engagement or using low profile tactics. One UN respondent replied, “We also tried using low-profile methods. That meant traveling in regular cars, dressing in normal clothes, and not standing out. No UN markings, no big convoys, just blending in with local traffic.”

NGOs, particularly local and national organizations, tend to rely on community-based acceptance as their primary protection strategy, which is incompatible with AE in many contexts. As one NGO explained, “We stayed through attacks by rebel forces, and they respected that we were there for humanitarian purposes.”

While most NGO respondents recommended community engagement as an alternative to AE, several also mentioned stakeholder mapping and negotiation as an alternative. One respondent replied, “There's nothing that can replace proper context and analysis, proper actor mapping, proper understanding of the risks and how to mitigate them.”

IASC non-binding Guidance Consideration

When asked if the IASC Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys are considered by the HCT, the respondents responses fell into three categories: 1) yes, guidelines are considered; 2) no, they are not considered; and 3) uncertain as to whether or not the guidelines are considered.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Some of the UN respondents adamantly confirmed the guidelines are used and taken into account by the HCT with one respondent stating they “very often… see the HCT actually following the guidelines very, very closely.” However, an equal number of respondents replied that the guidelines were non-binding and therefore bore little weight while a few respondents were uncertain or did not know if the guidelines were

considered. Illustrating this point, one respondent stated they “would be surprised if anybody even knew of [the guidelines] existence.”

The NGO respondents generally tended to believe the guidelines bore little weight. Almost half of key informants mentioned that the guidelines call for AE to only be used only as a last resort, but that this is not how AE are actually used in practice by UN agencies. As one respondent stated, “I’ve struggled to think of any UN staff that I’ve ever heard say… ‘No, we shouldn’t be doing this because it should only be a last resort.’” However, a few NGO respondents reported that the HCT did take the guidelines under consideration.

Triggers for Review of Armed Escort Use

Overall, the frequency of reviews of AE use and the triggers prompting these reviews differ across organizations. However, most respondents reported reviews being triggered by new security threats, government-imposed AE mandates, or funding limitations.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

UN organizations generally have more structured and bureaucratic AE review mechanisms, with a set schedule for SMT or HCT reviews. These reviews often take place annually or semi-annually as part of a broader security risk assessment. However, reviews can also be triggered by shifts in military control, changes in threat levels, operational logistics, supply chain considerations (including the need for large-scale aid movements), and government mandated AE requirements.

NGO organizations generally have less formalized AE review structures. Most of them reported not having scheduled reviews, but instead reactively reviewed the use of AE based on triggering events. Most respondents reported being triggered to review the use of AE when access or security concerns arose or when it was deemed to be having a negative impact on their relationships with local communities. Additionally, some NGOs, especially smaller ones, reported being triggered to review their use of AE based upon financial implications.

Discontinuation of Armed Escort Use

Most respondents replied that their organizations lack a concrete exit strategy for the use of AE, as disengaging from their use is difficult once dependency is established. As one UN respondent noted, “it is almost impossible to roll back armed escorts once you start using them because you have to prove that the threat has gone away, and that is difficult to do.” Almost all respondents whose organization uses AE reported that their organizations reliance upon AE had become institutionalized, making withdrawal

complicated unless security conditions improved significantly – especially since there is presence of remuneration for AE in many contexts.

Over-reliance on AE has also created institutional dependency. Transitioning away is challenging, especially after decades of embedded use. “We need very brave people in the UN to say we really don’t need armed escorts and find ways to transition away.”

Only one respondent replied that the UN had proposed structured plans to phase out AE use in areas where security assessments allowed, but these plans remained largely theoretical. This respondent stated “a proposal has been put forward by the [local humanitarian coordinating body] to develop exit strategies…however, progress on this proposal is still pending.” Overall, coordination among humanitarian actors on discontinuation remains limited, with differing security assessments leading to inconsistent approaches.

Capabilities and Performance of Armed Escorts

The perceived capability levels of AE varied among respondents. Some noted that escort providers were well-armed, uniformed, and communicated well with humanitarian organizations, while some described armed escorts as “pretty basic.” Areas of operation and the entity providing the escort (i.e., whether the escort was provided by a private security company, the national military or police, or the local military or police) were mentioned as factors that appear to affect the capabilities of AE.

Only a few respondents felt that humanitarian organizations assessed the capability of AE in advance of their use. Of the respondents whose organizations did assess the capabilities of escorts, one NGO respondent noted that, because “so many” private security companies “appl[ied] to provide the service,” a committee was sent to “evaluate the agencies and their capabilities.” A UN respondent noted a rigorous assessment approach for escorts provided by both military and private security actors: “Their capabilities were assessed before accepting them. A Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) is conducted and led by [UN Mission Name], and in some cases by UNDP, with contributions from various humanitarian agencies to parts of the policy.” One NGO respondent thought that UNDSS may have assessed the capability of escorts in their context before use by humanitarian organizations.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

UN respondents revealed a range in the capabilities of their AE providers. One respondent noted that, while “the vehicles are in relatively okay shape,” an ex-military colleague suggested that if their escort were to be ambushed, “they couldn’t do anything. They would be sitting ducks.” Other respondents described AE as more

sophisticated. One described AE provided by military actors as using Turkish or Chinese APCs and Toyota Hiluxs. The respondent added that “most have drones” and are “connected to Starlink.” Another mentioned that some AE have “advanced and heavy vehicles, a greater number of soldiers, reconnaissance teams, ground teams, and landmine detectors,” but noted that the capabilities of the escorts varied between providers.

Responses from NGO respondents regarding AE capabilities were also mixed. One respondent was unsure how to evaluate the capabilities of escorts, but described them as “a legitimate sort of military force with military assets and training.” Other respondents highlighted the differences that they noticed between escorts provided by private security companies as compared to those provided by government actors, with escorts provided by private companies having machine guns, radios, and uniforms. “Based on competition in the market, [private security agencies] do not want to lose their jobs so they train themselves. On the government side, training was not there” and “equipment was not there.”

Indirect Impact of Armed Escorts on Convoys and Civilians

A common challenge in the use of AE is increased visibility and risk, as they can make humanitarian convoys more recognizable and thus more vulnerable to attacks. “We’re using them to access populations [that] … were also the target of the same people” providing the escorts, one respondent warned, highlighting the paradoxical effect of using AE.

Perception and neutrality are also severely impacted. AE blurs the lines between humanitarian actors and military forces, eroding community trust. This perceived alignment with political or governmental entities undermines the principle of neutrality and can lead to targeted violence. “Humanitarian partners are seen as a … appendage supporting the government, so they become targeted,” noted one respondent.

In the long term, civilian perceptions of AE can deteriorate, transforming short-term protection into sustained mistrust. Communities may associate aid delivery with armed actors, which undermines humanitarian intentions. “The impact can be high on the perception of the civilian population receiving aid,” one participant emphasized.

Over time, AE contributes to long-term damage to humanitarian neutrality, making negotiations for safe access more difficult in future missions. “Using the army creates long-term issues,” said one respondent, emphasizing that dialogue and trust-building with armed groups is often more effective.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

Some NGOs reported facing rising criminal threats due to their increased profile when associated with AE. Targeted attacks, kidnappings, and thefts have become more common. “They’re abducting people to ransom them… they can steal the Toyota or resources and sell them,” said one respondent, pointing to the risk of opportunistic violence.

UN agencies generally follow structured security frameworks, but these often mandate AE use, resulting in limited flexibility and unintended restrictions. In some cases, military forces control AE availability, which can be used to deny humanitarian access. “If the military does not want aid to a certain area, they can just refuse the escort,” one UN respondent explained. In these instances, AE is used not just for protection but as a political tool to control humanitarian movement. This undermines not only neutrality but also impartiality by potentially preventing humanitarians from reaching areas with the greatest need, and further complicates principled access in politically contested regions.

Armed Escort Use of Force

The use of force by AE is generally restricted and rare, but there have been instances where AE have taken active security measures. While most respondents report that their organization’s AE have never had to use force, a few reported incidents near large protests or in high traffic areas where their AE will fire warning shots in the air “to make their presence known.” One NGO worker responded that AE at times have pushed people away from buildings to protect humanitarian premises. In most cases, though, respondents deny the use of force by AE. In a small number of extreme cases, AE presence has led to confrontations with armed groups, raising concerns about the humanitarian-military distinction.

Rules of Engagement

Of the organizations that use AE, only half reported participating in any form of rules of engagement (ROE) discussion with the escorts. Even among those who do, the depth and professionalism of the discussions vary widely.

Some organizations make deliberate efforts to clarify the humanitarian mandate and the expectations placed on AE. As one respondent shared, “Yes, [the NGO] give[s] them clear duties and responsibilities… they try to help [the AE] understand that they are humanitarian operators, and so this is not just normal business.”

However, only a few organizations reported conducting thorough, formalized mission briefs, and even then, there was uncertainty regarding the comprehensiveness of the ROE component. One respondent noted, “It does happen, but it doesn’t happen in a …

frequent or transparent or professional way," suggesting a lack of standardized procedures and quality assurance.

Operational ambiguity is compounded by a lack of clarity in responsibility and follow-through. One respondent admitted, "I think in principle they [the humanitarian organization] should brief the service providers, but in reality, I don't know. [The AE] have their own modalities, so they don't listen to you anyway." This highlights a deeper structural challenge: even when ROE discussions are conducted, AE operate under their own assumptions and chains of command, potentially limiting the effectiveness of these discussions.

Erosion of Humanitarian Principles

Most respondents across both NGO and UN agencies used the conclusion of their interviews to reflect on the broader implications of using AE. A recurring theme was the erosion of humanitarian principles in favor of delivery-focused mandates. As one NGO respondent put it, "You're able to deliver the aid, but ultimately I think it goes against… humanitarian principles of… neutrality and impartiality."

Several respondents, particularly NGOs, noted that the narrative around aid delivery is increasingly dismissive of foundational values and long-term impacts in favor of short term outcomes. "These principles are under threat from a narrative of 'don't worry about any of that, you just need to deliver,'" said one.

Dependency on AE emerged as a structural issue in many settings. Once AE becomes embedded in operations—especially where organizations are compensating military forces—disengagement becomes difficult. One interviewee noted, "Once the UN and other organizations started paying the military, it became hard to stop." This creates a cycle of reliance that limits flexibility and undermines long-term strategies.

Another concern raised by both NGO and UN actors is the limited scope of AE protection. While convoys may be secured, local staff embedded in communities remain exposed. "Who's going to protect them?" asked one respondent, highlighting that escorts do not ensure holistic security and only have limited impact on sustainably improving the operating environment.

UN vs. NGO Approaches

NGO respondents focused on the tension between short-term access and long-term acceptance. AE enables immediate aid delivery, but often at the cost of neutrality, trust, and future access. Some respondents called for a recommitment to community

engagement and negotiation with armed actors as alternatives to physical security measures.

Other points made by NGO respondents included emphasizing AE's role as a last resort, with suggestions that AE should only be used in extreme cases and solely for the protection of humanitarian staff and equipment—not as a core operational model. "Armed escorts are not a core principle of humanitarian movement," one NGO worker emphasized.

UN respondents echoed these concerns, with some explicitly stating that AE use is "totally incompatible with humanitarian principles." Several noted that AE creates blurred lines between neutral aid and political or military alignment, especially when escorts are provided by a party to the conflict.

The short-term benefits of AE were acknowledged—primarily in terms of access—but respondents warned of the long-term operational and reputational costs. One participant summarized it this way: "The short-term benefits would not outweigh" the consequences. UN staff also called for alternative strategies, such as strengthening relationships with local actors, engaging in negotiation, and emphasizing collective access across the humanitarian community. "The ultimate objective is not to get aid in just one day," one respondent stressed, "It's about having lasting assistance… for the wider humanitarian community."

Conclusion and Limitations

Conclusion

Conducted just over a decade after the publication of the 2013 IASC Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts by Humanitarian Convoys, this study represents the first publicly available accounting of the use of AE for humanitarian convoys in complex emergencies globally. The study provides both quantitative and qualitative data on the contexts in which AE are being used, who is using them, who is providing them, benefits, challenges, and alternatives to their use, and how key decisions are made around the use of AE by humanitarian actors. The data presented here is intended to be a useful baseline for the humanitarian community as it develops further policies and operational guidance related to the use of AE in humanitarian settings.

The key finding of this research, identified by the cross sectional survey, key informant interviews, and AI guided review, is that armed escorts are being used for humanitarian

convoys in roughly 2/3 of humanitarian contexts globally, though there are important differences in the frequency of AE use by the type of humanitarian actor. UN agencies, for instance, are the most likely to use them, followed by INGOs and NNGOs, according to survey and the AI guided review. UN agencies seem to set the tone for the use of AE in humanitarian settings, as there were no contexts in which NGOs were using AE but UN agencies were not.

The data also indicates that the main providers of AE are regional or host government military forces, and that non-state armed groups and private security companies are rarely used to escort humanitarian convoys. The reasons for this are not clearly elucidated in the research, though may simply reflect the fact that the majority of humanitarian aid delivery occurs in areas controlled by the state. In most cases where AE were used, the armed escort provider was also a party to the conflict. While AE were imposed by external actors in about a third of cases (usually by the host government), in most cases the decision to use AE was made either by the humanitarian community as a whole (most commonly through the HCT) or by individual humanitarian organizations. According to the survey results, the HCT has an established position in favor of the use of AE in the majority (though certainly not all) of the contexts where they are currently being used.

That being said, key informant interviews reflect that while NGOs were consulted or at least made aware of UN decisions around the use of AE, these decisions were principally made within the UN system. This often puts NGOs in the difficult position of deciding between bending their own humanitarian principles by using AE or foregoing AE and creating a situation of divergent security procedures across humanitarian organizations. More effort is needed to incorporate NGOs into the decision-making process around the use of AE, which remains UN led, in order to ensure a greater consensus across the humanitarian community before it is used in a given context (or when deciding to phase out its use). While some key informants noted that the decision to use armed escorts was reevaluated from time to time, it was clear from the interviews that it was not being reevaluated as regularly as recommended by the IASC non-binding guidelines.

According to the survey results, the most common reasons for humanitarian actors to utilize AE were the capability of the armed escort to provide a credible deterrent to attack and the level of humanitarian need and criticality of programs being implemented in their context. This is in line with the minimum criteria for AE use from the IASC non-binding guidelines, reflecting likely on the awareness of HCTs about at least this portion of the guidelines. However, pressure from host governments to use AE was also noted in about a third of contexts where AE are used. The key informant interviews also

provided additional insight into the difficult humanitarian access challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in many of these contexts and the underlying reasons for the use of AE, including risk mitigation, pressure from host governments, and protecting humanitarian workers and assets.

The challenges and drawbacks to the use of AE were also discussed at length in the key informant interviews, including high cost, loss of acceptance by local communities, limiting of access to locations where AE were willing to go (which can affect the impartial distribution of aid to areas of highest need), variability in AE capabilities, and in some cases posing new security risks for humanitarian staff. Among the reasons not to use AEs that were noted by both UN and NGO respondents were that use of AE could increase risk to the convoys, erode humanitarian neutrality and impartiality, decrease acceptance by the very populations they were trying to help, and that the only AE available were also a party to the conflict. The seeming contradiction present in these findings that AE can both reduce and increase the risk for humanitarian convoys demonstrates the complexity of operating in humanitarian settings and the difficulties inherent in humanitarian decision making.

Interviewees discussed numerous alternatives to the use of AE. Community engagement was the most common alternative strategy used by both UN agencies and NGOs. For UN agencies, the second most common was reducing organizational profile while for NGOs it was stakeholder mapping and negotiation.

Interviewees also discussed how difficult it was to phase out AE once their use became entrenched in a given context. Part of this difficulty relates to the financialization of AE, with some escorts turning security provision into a profit-making enterprise, creating a dependency cycle that is difficult for humanitarian actors to break. The financialization of AE, at least in some settings, also leads to a divergence in security approaches between different humanitarian actors based on whether or not they are able to afford the financial costs of AE.

Limitations

There are a number of important limitations to this research that should be noted. First, this study only provides a snapshot in time (July to December 2024) and cannot tell us whether the use of AE is currently increasing or decreasing in humanitarian settings globally. Indeed, given how rapidly situations change in these various humanitarian contexts, it is possible that much of the information in this report will be out of date within a year or two. Second, our cross sectional survey represents a convenience sample of just 1-2 respondents on average per context, though this report still remains the largest publicly available study on the use of armed escorts for humanitarian

convoys globally. Participants were identified using a snowball sampling approach, since no sampling frames exist from which participants could be randomly drawn, limiting the representativeness of the data. To make up for the bias inherent in this type of data collection, we also performed the AI guided review of internet sources. While this also has its own limitations and biases, such as being limited to data publicly available online, it was reassuring to note that our survey and AI guided review produced similar results.

While the initial goal was to achieve an average of 2 respondents per context (1 UN and 1 NGO) we were not quite able to achieve that despite extending the period of data collection, translating the survey into multiple languages, and asking participants to push it out to others in their organizations. This may reflect a level of unwillingness on the part of humanitarian actors to discuss the use of AE, even in a confidential survey, or alternatively that they were just too busy to fill out the survey or lacked sufficient internet connectivity to complete it. Because of the limited sample size, we are not able to perform inferential statistics to identify correlations between different factors or subgroup analyses to see how results differed by actor or context. We can only provide descriptive statistics. No data was available for 4 of the 36 contexts, though it is unlikely that data from these 4 contexts would have altered the overall results.

As is true for all qualitative data, the results of the key informant interviews represent the opinions of the 25 individuals we interviewed working for UN agencies or humanitarian NGOs in the contexts studied. Their responses may be colored by personal biases or gaps in their knowledge of humanitarian operations, coordination systems, guidelines, and principles.

By design, this study only provides the perspective of humanitarian staff, mostly working for UN agencies or INGOs, and not the perspectives of local community members, governments, security organizations, or international donors. In order to not overwhelm participants with too many questions, either in the quantitative survey or key informant interviews, we were limited in how many questions we could ask. For instance, we did not obtain data on how AE used varied geographically across different contexts, how long AE had been used in any given context, and perhaps most importantly, detailed information about how many contexts were able to phase out use of AE over time and how they accomplished it.

Recommendations

Some preliminary results of this research were presented both virtually to the CMAG in February 2025 and at the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in Geneva,

Switzerland in March 2025 in a hybrid format. After hearing the results, audience members were split into four breakout groups where they discussed the findings and made recommendations for future research and practice considerations. These recommendations include:

1) Repeat this study or a version of it on a regular basis in order to track trends over time.
2) Expand the size of the survey to allow for disaggregation of data by factors such as the criticality of mission, the humanitarian context, and the type of humanitarian actor and AE provider to see how these might influence the use of AE.
3) Include additional perspectives in future research, such as those of community members, local NGOs, governments, UNDSS, security providers, and humanitarian donors.
4) Collect case studies of successful efforts to wind down or phase out the use of AE in contexts where they had become entrenched.
5) Conduct a mapping and comparison of Security Risk Assessments (SRA) across contexts, which could allow for a comparison of armed escort requirements in official SMT documents, as well as how many of these SRAs included input from humanitarian coordination structures like the HAWG or CMCoord Working Group.
6) UN OCHA CMCS should consider coordinating with key UN agencies to establish a formal, secure, tracking system and central database for regular reporting on the use of AE in humanitarian contexts globally.
7) Better define the principle of last resort to ensure a more consistent interpretation of the IASC non-binding guidelines, and ensure better alignment between the IASC non-binding guidelines and UNSMS policy.
8) Continue sensitization to promote a coherent approach to the issue of armed escorts that minimizes negative impact.
9) Conduct a coordinated and systematic reevaluation of both the effectiveness and cost of risk mitigation measures across the humanitarian sector, including the use of AEs.
10) Enhance awareness within the humanitarian community on the risks and consequences of the establishment of a political economy linked to the use of armed escorts.

Appendix

Cross Sectional Survey Questions

1. Do any humanitarian organizations in your area of operations currently use armed escorts?

2. Who uses armed escorts for humanitarian convoys in your area of operations?
    a. UN entities
    b. INGOs
    c. NNGOs
    d. Both UN entities and INGOs
    e. All of the above
    f. No actors use armed escorts in my area of operations
    g. I do not know

3. How frequently do UN entities use armed escorts for humanitarian convoys in your area of operations?
    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never
    d. I do not know

4. How frequently do INGOs use armed escorts for humanitarian convoys in your area of operations?
    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never
    d. I do not know

5. How frequently do NNGOs use armed escorts for humanitarian convoys in your area of operations?
    a. Always
    b. Sometimes
    c. Never
    d. I do not know

6. Do external actors require the use of armed escorts in your area of operations?
    a. Yes
    b. No and we do not use armed escorts

c. No, and we still elect to use armed escorts
d. I do not know

7. Who imposes the use of armed escorts on humanitarian actors in your area of operations?
    a. Government or state military authorities
    b. Armed groups in areas under their control
    c. Other (please specify):
    d. I do not know

8. Which of the following criteria are considered when deciding on the use of armed escorts? (please select all that apply):
    a. Humanitarian need and programme criticality
    b. Responsible authorities won't allow movement without escorts
    c. Safety and security necessity
    d. Sustainability
    e. Decision is based on established practice in the past
    f. The respect for the humanitarian principles
    g. Other (please specify):
    h. Not applicable

9. Does the HCT have a common positioning on the use of armed escorts?
    a. Yes, the HCT discussed it and recommended the use of armed escorts for all humanitarian entities operating on the ground
    b. Yes, the HCT discussed it and recommended that no humanitarian entities use armed escorts
    c. Yes, the HCT discussed it; and no common approach was agreed upon
    d. No, Armed Escorts are discussed only at the SMT -level
    e. No, Armed Escorts are not discussed here, each organization makes an individual choice on whether to use them
    f. I do not know

10. Please indicate which coordination forums discuss armed escorts **before** bringing the issue to the HCT (select all that apply)
    a. The HAWG
    b. CMCoord Cell
    c. SMT
    d. The INGO Forum
    e. None - armed escorts are not discussed prior to the HCT
    f. It was already in-place before I joined
    g. Other (please specify):

h. I do not know

11. Which of the following alternatives to armed escorts have been considered/discussed in your AoO? (please select all that apply):
    a. Cultivating greater acceptance
    b. Humanitarian negotiations
    c. Remote management
    d. Low-Profile approach
    e. Area security
    f. Change in programme design
    g. Suspend or cease of operations
    h. Risk transfer to partners
    i. None of the above

12. Is there a common humanitarian approach to the use of alternatives to armed escorts in your area of operation?
    a. Yes, alternative measures are discussed and endorsed by the HCT
    b. No, it's up to each individual organization to decide.
    c. Yes, but only for UN entities; INGOs make their independent choices without consultation.
    d. Other (please specify):
    e. I do not know

13. Who provides armed escorts in your AoR?
    a. Host Government Military Forces and/or Police
    b. UN Peacekeeping Military Forces/Police
    c. Regional Organization Military Forces/Police
    d. Other Foreign Military Force/Police
    e. Nonstate Armed Groups (NSAGs)
    f. Private Security Company
    g. No one provides armed escorts in my AoO

14. Has the Security Management Team (or Humanitarian Country Team) in your operational area adopted the use of armed escorts as a security risk management measure?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I do not know

15. Is the provider of an armed escort a party to the conflict or regularly engaged in hostile activities with any opposing forces?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Not applicable - no one provides armed escorts in my AoO

Key Informant Interview Protocol

The interview protocol contains two types of questions. The first type of question is broad and invites all interviewees to think about the use of armed escorts. The second type of question is narrow and is only applicable to interviewees who have either used or are actively using armed escorts. If armed actors are not being used, they will not be asked the narrow questions.

Inform the interviewee that his/her answers will be anonymized and not traceable back to them. The interviewee has the right to express their opinion that might be divergent from the organization's and if the case should let the interviewer know that. The reason being it will allow the data to be disaggregated between practice and organizational position.

1. What are the key access challenges in your organization's area of operation?
    a. What are some of the measures you have put in place to mitigate security risks and ensure the continuity of operations?

2. What ultimately influenced the decision whether to use armed escorts in your organization's area of operation? (If armed escorts are used) Is their usage ongoing?
    a. (If usage ended) What influenced your organization's decision to stop using the armed escorts?

3. Are NGOs that are not involved in the Security Management Team (SMT) or Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) consulted on the use of armed escorts?
    a. (If so) Can you tell me how they are consulted and how your organization uses these consultations?
        i. In your opinion, is the consultation process inclusive?

4. In your opinion, what happens when some organizations use armed escorts and others do not in the same operating environment?

5. In your opinion, what are some of the key challenges and benefits of using armed escorts? What do you think should go into the considerations regarding the use of armed escorts?

6. What alternatives, if any, are there to using armed escorts? Can you give me an example from your area of operation?

7. In your experience, does the HCT consider the Inter-Agency Standing Committee non-binding guidelines criteria to guide the decision-making processes on the use of armed escorts?

8. (If armed escorts are used) How often is the decision to use or not use armed escorts is reviewed and what are the triggers that prompt that review?

9. (If armed escorts are used) Can you please tell me about any exit strategy/discontinuation plan for the use of armed escorts?
    a. (Potential follow-up if there is a plan) Who took part in the development of the plan?
    b. Have you implemented this plan before, or more generally, have you discontinued use of armed escorts before?

10. (If armed escorts are used) Are the Armed Escort Providers paid or receive remuneration from requesting agencies? Do they receive other incentives like food, water or accommodation during missions?
    a. Have you ever ceased payments to armed escorts, and if so, how did you go about ceasing their payments? How would you advise others to do this?

11. (If armed escorts are used) What are the security and military capabilities of the escort provider, for example, the type of units, number of personnel, radio communications, etc.
    a. Were these capabilities assessed before accepting them?

12. (If armed escorts are used) In your opinion, how did the armed escorts impact the security of the convoy and/or civilians receiving aid?

13. (If armed escorts are used) Has there been a situation in your duty station where the armed actor providing the escort had to use force during any escort missions?

14. (If armed escorts are used) In your experience, do partners usually discuss the Rules of Engagement with the actor providing the Escort?

15. Any other thoughts the interviewee wants to share that have not already been captured?