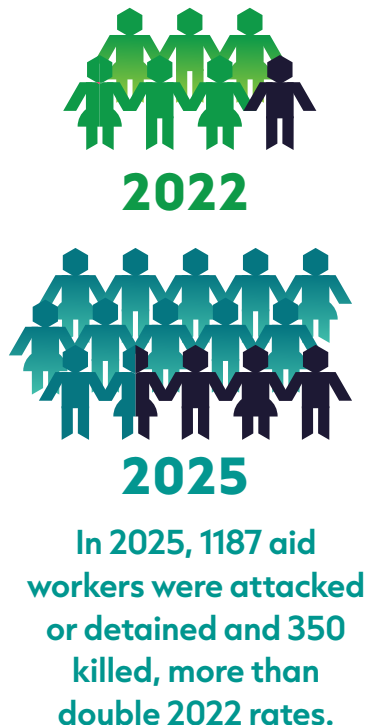


CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

Escalating violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), shrinking humanitarian space and increasingly politicised donor behaviour made it harder to deliver principled assistance and protect civilians. Humanitarians adapted their security practices, worked with community-protection mechanisms and strengthened their focus on humanitarian diplomacy. Their efforts, however, were insufficient to offset the scale of external pressures and lack of accountability for IHL violations.

The global political environment created high protection risks for people affected by crisis and for humanitarian staff. Conflict escalated and combatants' approaches increasingly violated IHL. Evidence of genocide was found against Israel's actions in Gaza and against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan. This period represented the deadliest time in 25 years to be an aid worker. There were 1,187 aid workers affected by major security incidents and 350 deaths among humanitarian personnel in 2025, with local staff most at risk. States became the largest source of attacks on both aid and health workers. These threats stymied humanitarians' ability to assist and protect people affected by crisis.



Humanitarians used advocacy and operational shifts to strengthen security for staff and volunteers. The United Nations (UN) Security Council adopted Resolution 2730 in 2024 to protect humanitarian personnel and infrastructure, and some organisations began to invest more in security for local staff and insurance schemes, although pockets of good practice in contexts like Ukraine and Sudan did not always translate widely. Humanitarian actors engaged more with private security and technology firms to obtain access in insecure contexts. However, these partnerships revealed a need for greater shared learning and guardrails to avoid harm to people affected by crisis and threats to humanitarian principles. Funding cuts threatened the increased professionalisation of security, catalysing losses to joint information and training services and staff.

Humanitarians struggled against strong governments and de facto authorities to provide impartial support and protection for people affected by crisis. In contexts like Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Sudan, this

challenged independent and impartial assistance and required effective negotiation skills and stronger direction from leadership and donors on what was permissible. Strict government regulations for civil society organisations also threatened humanitarians' ability to protect people from human rights abuses in multiple contexts, including Afghanistan and Gaza. Donor government priorities around security, migration and anti-terrorism also threatened the independence of humanitarian assistance.

For local actors in contexts like Gaza, Myanmar and Ukraine, politically driven crises fuelled existing debates over the appropriateness of neutrality and independence as humanitarian principles. There were growing calls to consider humanitarian solidarity or justice as principles to tackle root causes of oppression. However, for other actors, maintaining neutrality and independence remained essential to both their effectiveness and the safety of their staff. The system will increasingly need to ask what it means for organisations that rely on commitments to neutrality and independence for access, security and influence to coexist alongside other organisations who use more explicitly political approaches to upholding humanity.

Advocates pushed hard for protection to be considered 'lifesaving' within the Humanitarian Reset and worked to improve the focus on the 'Centrality of Protection' in response planning and operations. Cross-sector engagement on protection and leadership from Humanitarian Coordinators, however, required strengthening. Operational actors and donors stepped up humanitarian diplomacy, influencing political decision-makers to strengthen adherence to IHL and humanitarian access. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) launched a Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, given accountability for IHL violations had been sorely lacking in this period. Humanitarians recognised a need for greater transparency and accountability if patterns of impunity are to be broken.



395
MILLION

**395m people faced
serious protection risk in
2025, with women and
children disproportionately
affected.**