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International policy on the protection of children's rights in conflict zones: The experience of Syria and Yemen

Abstract. The relevance of this study is driven by the growing urgency of protecting children's rights in armed conflict zones against the backdrop of an increasing number of protracted wars and the growing complexity of international humanitarian response efforts. This study aimed to analyse the effectiveness of international mechanisms for the protection of children's rights in armed conflicts, using the cases of Syria and Yemen as examples. The methodological framework of the study was based on an interdisciplinary approach combining structural-institutional and comparative analysis with the analysis of international legal norms. These findings also showed that international policy for the protection of children's rights in Syria and Yemen is primarily reactive and is largely oriented towards eliminating the humanitarian consequences and not the causes of structural child rights violations. According to the study, the main obstacles to the efficient use of international mechanisms are the unavailability of a number of large areas for humanitarian operations, for the implementation of monitoring and inspection missions; political differences in the United Nations Security Council; the effects of sanctions and the blockade regime; and the lack of sufficient mechanisms for ensuring accountability for grave violations of children's rights. Comparative analysis showed that in Syria, the most important factors determining the situation are the military and political nature of the conflict in many countries and the dependence of humanitarian operations on the international political situation, and in Yemen, this is a combination of economic and political crisis, blockade and degradation of government institutions. It can be concluded that the effectiveness of international policy on the protection of children from armed conflicts could increase if humanitarian activities are depoliticised, control and enforcement mechanisms are strengthened, and there is a close connection between humanitarian operations and political efforts for the de-escalation of conflicts. The results of this research may be used to understand the limits and opportunities of international law and institutions regarding the protection of the most vulnerable. They could also contribute to the formulation of more effective humanitarian policy tools in conditions of armed confrontation

Keywords: humanitarian access; monitoring; sanctions; politicisation; recruitment

Introduction

A set of international policy instruments regarding children's rights in armed conflict came into being due to significant changes in the type of violence characteristic of war. Such violence now mostly consists of conflicts that are of prolonged duration and have a fragmented and multi-sided nature rather than short-term conflicts between states. For example, the conflicts in Syria and Yemen have exemplified those changes; the long-term

destruction of the state, the involvement of multiple non-state armed groups, the large-scale participation of foreign powers, and the lack of a durable settlement in these countries have resulted in the de facto elimination of civilian protection mechanisms. Thus, under these conditions, child security in Syria and Yemen has become more than a humanitarian phenomenon; it has become an important indicator of the effectiveness of international

Received: 24.01.2026, Revised: 27.05.2026, Accepted: 26.06.2026, Published: 08.07.2026.

Suggested Citation:

Malkhasyan, L., & Safaryan, G. (2026). International policy on the protection of children's rights in conflict zones: The experience of Syria and Yemen. *Foreign Affairs*, 36(3), 114-127. doi: 10.59214/ua.fa/3.2026.114.

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policy. The reason is that the child population is most affected by any degradation of the institution, any violation of international humanitarian law, blocking the humanitarian access, and the fragmentation of conflicts. In her article, I. Zharovska (2022) argues that the transformation of armed conflict, from the traditional confrontation between states to a complex multi-layered military conflict, has significantly changed the operating environment for international humanitarian law. She proves that despite the universalism and the formal completeness of these rules as norms, the rules are not particularly effective in modern conflict because they lack coordination and mechanisms for the efficient implementation of control and sanctions. Therefore, international humanitarian law has a great value as a normative framework that coordinates, and as a universal civilisational achievement, which aims to protect human rights during war, but is actually used, it creates contradictions between national and international legal regulations, as well as, in most cases, the lack of effective mechanisms for the enforcement of these legal norms by the international community.

However, in scientific publications, the problem of protecting the rights of children in war has primarily been considered from the perspective of the relationship between the international legal obligations of states on the one hand and the political conditions of their implementation on the other. I.I. Pylypyshyna & O.G. Turchenko (2022) state that the provision of human security and, in particular, the security of children – the most vulnerable category of people – is the main state responsibility and one of the key reasons for the creation and existence of international organisations. The authors conclude that while the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child established a special legal status of children and defined the standards and conditions for protecting their rights, in the case of armed conflicts, the norms are not backed up by any effective instruments of enforcement. A similar argument was developed by V.V. Chernobuk (2025), whose study demonstrated that, in armed conflicts characterised by a high degree of actor fragmentation, the norms of international humanitarian law are implemented selectively and depend to a large extent on the political and security considerations of the conflicting parties.

A specialised area of research is dedicated to the analysis of institutional arrangements created within the framework of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. F. Seatzu (2021) considered the formation of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) as an attempt to institutionalise the process of gathering, systematising, and gaining political visibility of data on gross violations of the rights of children in armed conflicts. The author showed that before the adoption of the MRM, the magnitude and nature of the impact of violence on children had not been sufficiently documented, and in the absence of standardised criteria for data analysis, the absence of unified reporting criteria prevented an adequate response from the UN Security Council. A.A.A. Rabeeah *et al.* (2025) studied the issue of the protection of civilians, and particularly children, in the context of the global escalation of military conflicts and the increasing number of children participating in war violence. It was shown that the deterioration of children's development and quality of life in the

zones of active hostilities became significantly more intense as a result of their forced migration, involvement in combat activities of armed groups or auxiliary positions. The conflicts in Syria and Yemen have been highlighted in the scientific literature as exemplary cases for identifying the limitations in the practical application of international policy under crisis conditions. M. Ba-Break *et al.* (2024) analysed the Syrian conflict in terms of the functioning of the humanitarian and medical-epidemiological systems during protracted war actions. The authors demonstrated that, even where a certain level of institutional preparedness had been developed as a result of previous crises and epidemics, the multilateral nature of the conflict, the destruction of infrastructure, and the instability of governance systems resulted in severe restrictions on humanitarian access and the selective implementation of international norms.

By contrast, in the study by M. Elayah & M. Fenttman (2021), the Yemeni conflict was analysed as an example of a humanitarian crisis in which military operations were combined with economic blockade and the collapse of basic state governance institutions. The study demonstrated that humanitarian assistance in Yemen was increasingly being used as an instrument of political and economic pressure, becoming part of the war economy and a factor contributing to the prolongation of the conflict. At the same time, in the study by R.A.R. Alhuniti (2023), the Yemeni conflict was examined within a geopolitical and security framework, and the authors noted the decisive role of the positions and actions of regional and extra-regional countries. He proves that the dynamics of the crisis were determined not only by the domestic but also by the degree of external factors. Consequently, the humanitarian agenda has become secondary to the logic of strategic confrontation, while the protection of civilian populations, including children, depends on the specific constellation of geopolitical interests and security priorities of external factors rather than on an exclusively humanitarian rationale.

Despite the considerable number of studies of problems of the protection of children's rights during armed conflicts, the overwhelming majority of them are focused on the analysis of international legal norms or are presented as a description of isolated cases of the provision of humanitarian assistance to specific conflict areas, while the interplay of legal, institutional and political factors specific to certain conflict environments does not receive sufficient scientific attention. The link between the different types of wartime settings and the real effectiveness of international policy in protecting children has not been fully addressed. This study aimed to analyse international approaches to the protection of children's rights in warzones on the example of Syria and Yemen, with special attention paid to the effectiveness of the functioning of international legal instruments. The study objectives consisted of systematising the theoretical and legal basis and the international standards for protecting children's rights in warzones; analysing the mechanisms of their implementation and the factors limiting their effectiveness, as well as comparing the humanitarian situation and the international community's response to it in Syria and Yemen.

Materials and Methods

This study used an interdisciplinary approach involving international relations, international humanitarian law, the study of armed conflict and the processing of qualitative and, to a lesser extent, quantitative data. The analytical period 2011–2025 was considered, which makes it possible to trace the dynamics of international policy on the protection of children's rights from the initial phase of the Syrian conflict and the subsequent escalation of the war in Yemen to the stage of institutional and humanitarian response. The main objects of analysis were chosen as the protracted wars in Syria and Yemen, characterised by a strong degree of fragmentation of political authority, a significant level of involvement of external players, and systematic reproduction of several serious violations of children's rights. The study also considers the impact of external players on the creation and functioning of international mechanisms for protecting children's rights in these countries, with the example of the USA and the European Union.

The study was conducted in three stages. In the first stage of research, children's rights in wartime were systematised in accordance with the hierarchy of norms and the functional role of the instruments used in order to distinguish between basic, universal norms and specialised treaty obligations. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949) were used as the analytical basis. The selection of these legal sources was based on the fact that these are universal, legally binding for the vast majority of states, and fundamental in terms of the standardisation of children's rights protection in times of armed conflict. In addition, the following resolutions of the UN Security Council were analysed: Resolution 1612 (2005), Resolution 1882 (2009), Resolution 1998 (2011), and Resolution 2225 (2015). These resolutions were chosen because they relate specifically to the formation and evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mechanism, as well as to the development of monitoring, reporting and political response procedures and instruments. These documents were used as a reference framework for a reconstruction of the development of the international architecture for the protection of children and identification of the instruments for monitoring, reporting and political response in the context of armed conflicts.

The second stage of the research was based on the empirical and comparative analysis of the situation of children in Syria and Yemen. The analysis compared the child mortality and morbidity indicators, children's access to education and basic medical care, as well as levels of food security. The criteria for selecting the sources for the second phase of the research were that they had to contain identical, compatible, methodologically comparable data, which is regularly updated to accurately compare the differences across different contexts. The central sources included materials from UNICEF (2025a; 2025b; n.d.), the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2025), and the General Assembly Security Council reports (2022; 2025), which were used to assess humanitarian needs, access to education and medical services and cases of child

recruitment. Additionally, a report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2025) was also used to evaluate the socio-economic long-term effects of the conflict on children. The comparative analysis was conducted according to the following parameters: the nature and types of violations of children's rights, conditions of humanitarian access, the degree of institutional collapse, and the dependence of humanitarian assistance on the military-political control of territories.

The third stage of the study focused on synthesising the findings in order to identify directions for improving international policy on the protection of children's rights in zones of armed confrontation. At this stage, analytical work was based on the triangulation of empirical data (qualitative sources: UN and specialised international bodies, international organisations' official documents, analytical reports). The materials used enabled an assessment of the size of children's humanitarian needs and the limitations of operational response to long-term conflict. Content analysis of official documents from meetings of the UN Security Council to analyse political and institutional barriers to humanitarian access, especially those published by the United Nations (2023), to see how the political disagreements between member states influenced decisions and implementation of humanitarian mandates. Combined use of these methods and sources allowed building a multi-level analytical reconstruction of international policy to protect children's rights in Syria and Yemen, consisting of normative-legal analysis, empirical data on the humanitarian situation and political constraints assessment. Such an approach allowed for the identification of the full picture of the UN's institutional mechanisms functioning in real conditions of prolonged conflicts and the factors limiting their effectiveness.

Results

Theoretical and legal foundations of the protection of children's rights in armed conflicts. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups of the civilian population, and their security, health and development depend directly on the ability of the international community to ensure effective mechanisms of protection in the conditions of institutional destruction, violation of the rule of law and systematic violence. The comprehensive system of international legal standards to protect the rights of children in war is the product of a multi-level development of international humanitarian and criminal law and human rights law, indicating an increase in awareness of the extent of armed conflicts and their impact on children. Normative foundations are presented as a set of universal treaties, specific humanitarian law norms and international bodies' decisions on the content and procedural mechanisms of protecting children's rights in war. A fundamental element of this framework is its universality: all rules designed to safeguard children ought to apply in any situation, irrespective of the type of armed conflict or the position of the belligerent parties. International law provides a general framework consisting of the absolute priority of the best interests of the child, a ban on the use of children for war, and the assurance of humanitarian access.

At the same time, the most advanced international rules and standards constitute only one part of the

international protection system, in which institutions play a decisive role. The institutional mechanism for ensuring children's rights in conflicts is based on multi-level interaction between the United Nations (UN), specialised humanitarian response structures, international non-governmental organisations, and regional actors. In particular, UNICEF plays a key role in applying these standards in practice, implementing programmes on the protection, education and psychological care of children (UNICEF, 2025b), and also the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, n.d.) coordinates humanitarian activities, gaining access to the relevant territories and conducting negotiations with the warring parties. It is institutions that define the possibility of actually applying international standards, which ensure monitoring and verification of violations, especially through the MRM created under Resolution 1612 (2005) as part of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. This mechanism provides the evidentiary base for the discussion of violations at the UN Security Council. International humanitarian non-governmental organisations are also an integral part of the institutional architecture: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (2025) guarantees the safety of the civilian population, including children, and promotes adherence to the rules of international law during armed conflict. The development of institutions protecting children directly reflected changes like contemporary armed conflicts, the most important of which were the growing participation of non-state armed actors, territorial fragmentation, and an increase in the political aspect of humanitarian activity. The UN notes an increase in the share

of non-international conflicts with participation of non-state actors in the number of conflicts: they comprised less than half of all conflicts in the 1990s and were most common in the 2010-2020s. UN Security Council analytical reviews and the report of the Secretary-General on the Children and Armed Conflict (General Assembly Security Council, 2025). As a result, international organisations have had to move from long-term child protection programmes to ad hoc and fragmented ones, restricted by limited access. At the same time, the politicisation of humanitarian issues has increased, as the situation of children has become part of the broader bargaining processes between the warring parties and their sponsors.

To conclude, it should be noted that the international system designed to protect children's rights in the context of armed conflict has a systemic character, since it is created not by separate norms or bodies, but by their complex interaction. The quality of this system depends on how consistent the legal standards are, on the ability of bodies to conduct monitoring and respond to problems, and on the political conditions for implementation of these mechanisms. Thus, in order to form a complete view on the structural parameters and real possibilities of these mechanisms, a comparative analysis of the key elements of the mechanism for the protection of children in conflict was carried out (Table 1), enabling an assessment of its functionality, systemic limitations and degree of effectiveness. The data presented demonstrate the extent to which normative and institutional components operate in a coordinated and effective manner, particularly in conditions of high intensity and political fragmentation of conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

Table 1. International legal standards and institutional mechanisms for the protection of children in armed conflicts

Mechanism	Functions	Conflict prevention	Limitations	Ratification and effectiveness in Yemen	Ratification and effectiveness in Syria
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Guarantees children's right to protection from violence, exploitation, and involvement in war; establishes global standards	A core normative instrument for reporting, sanctions, and diplomatic pressure	Lack of enforcement mechanisms	Ratified; systematic violations of provisions	Ratified; systematic violations of provisions
Geneva Conventions	Protection of civilians; prohibition of attacks on schools and hospitals; prohibition of child recruitment	Legal foundation for war crimes investigations	Violations in affected territories; difficulty in evidence collection	Ratified by the government; Houthis and the coalition regularly violate provisions	Ratified; systematic violations of provisions
UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)	Define six grave violations and trigger sanction mechanisms	Reporting; listing of conflict parties in blacklist mechanisms	Political vetoes, limited sanctions capacity, state resistance	Government, coalition, and Houthis are listed in sanctions/monitoring lists	Government, opposition forces, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are listed
UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)	Records violations, ensures verification, and informs the UNSC	Used for negotiations, sanctions, and international pressure	Restricted access; threats to monitors; data manipulation	Restricted access for monitoring teams	Restricted access for monitoring teams
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Humanitarian assistance, education, healthcare services, demobilisation of child soldiers	Work in refugee camps; protection and reintegration programmes	Funding shortages; attacks on humanitarian missions	Restricted access for monitoring teams	Restricted access for monitoring teams

Table 1. Continued

Mechanism	Functions	Conflict prevention	Limitations	Ratification and effectiveness in Yemen	Ratification and effectiveness in Syria
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	Monitoring of human rights violations; establishment of evidentiary bases for tribunals	Conducts investigations; publishes periodic reports	Denial of access to conflict zones; governmental pressure	Limited access to data	Limited access to data
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Protection of civilians; medical assistance; negotiation of humanitarian corridors	Provision of medical aid; facilitation of negotiations on humanitarian corridors	Blockades; attacks on personnel; failure of parties to guarantee neutrality	Restricted access to territories	Restricted access to territories

Source: compiled by the authors based on Geneva Convention... (1949), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Resolution 1612 (2005), Resolution 1882 (2009), Resolution 1998 (2011), Resolution 2225 (2015), HIP (2024), General Assembly Security Council (2025), UNICEF (2025a)

Generalisation of legal and institutional mechanisms for the protection of children's rights in the armed conflict shows that such a system is created on the basis of some kind of normative institutional complex logic. Even though they differ in nature and functions, all of these mechanisms work to achieve similar goals to provide children's protection at the level of minimum required standards in the conditions of the most difficult war and armed conflicts. The norms themselves serve as symbolic and legal grounds, but they cannot, on their own, change the behaviour of the parties to the conflict; additional institutional instruments are needed for that. In turn, the UN and other humanitarian organisations are able to respond and have a direct impact on the humanitarian crisis, although they are often limited by a lack of funds, political context and safety issues. The general analysis of indicators of ratification and implementation in the states of Syria and Yemen has shown their common points and general problems. Although both countries are formal signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions, and several UN Security Council resolutions that prohibit the recruitment of child soldiers, the implementation of domestic laws for protection and justice has failed to produce operational consequences. The institutions that have been functioning, in particular the CAAC and the MRM, have not been effective because of the lack of access to the territory as a condition for monitoring and reporting, and because of the lack of cooperation of the de facto actors. In both cases, there has been a high level of politicisation in the implementation of norms, where humanitarian and human rights institutions have been used for various political needs in the military and political context, and not for all countries as a universal system. Table 1, therefore, shows in both states the same problem: a high degree of formality in the ratification of international norms and the lack of their effectiveness on the basis of institutional limitations, political fragmentation and the prevalence of military logic over humanitarian norms.

The difficulty of securing safe, consistent passage for humanitarian and monitoring missions to active conflict zones represents a structural barrier to international mechanisms for the protection of children. In Syria, where there is a complex and multi-dimensional conflict that has been going on since 2011, the control over areas has been fragmented, and governance has been uneven among

government troops, different rebel factions and radical armed groups (UNDP, 2025). Such a combat arrangement significantly complicates the access of humanitarian convoys and monitoring groups to a vast number of inhabited areas, influencing the level of aid provided and the extent of information about violations. According to the General Assembly Security Council (2025), in 2024, 1,301 cases of grave violations of children's rights affecting 1,205 minors were verified in Syria; however, these statistics represent only those territories that were accessible, and therefore, it is impossible to judge the real scale of humanitarian issues. In Yemen, access to territories is severely restricted due to a combination of military-political and logistical factors. A prolonged blockade of key ports, control over transport arteries and numerous regions by the Houthi movement, government forces, and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition have created a configuration in which the movement of humanitarian convoys is almost always accompanied by inspections, delays, or complete obstruction (AlAdeimi, 2021). The Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) (2024) reports that more than two-thirds of confirmed cases of denial of humanitarian access in 2024 occurred in Yemen, where restrictions were imposed at all stages, from delays in approvals to obstruction of the unloading of humanitarian cargo and the blocking of internal movement within the country.

Political interference with the delivery of humanitarian aid and external pressure constitute institutional and political obstacles to international mechanisms for the protection of children in the context of conflict. In the practice of armed confrontations, humanitarian resources frequently assume the character of an instrument of influence, deployed by parties to the conflict or external political participants to achieve strategic advantages. In Yemen, this pattern is reflected in the Saudi-led military alliance restricting the access routes to humanitarian aid deliveries. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights observed that cargo shipments, for example, had been delayed or diverted to match military objectives, and that they violated humanitarian neutrality and independence principles (Al-Adeimi, 2021). Such practices hinder the activities of humanitarian organisations both in terms of planning their operations and during direct delivery of assistance to the affected population, in particular, delays or failure to deliver aid, affect the lives of the civilian

population, first and foremost, of children. As a result, there may be interruptions in the supply of food, medicine and other urgent assistance, thus contributing to the emergence of famine, the spread of diseases and the overall humanitarian crisis among minors. Also, similar processes are taking place in Syria, where disputes between members of the UN Security Council (including veto) have affected the form and scope of external humanitarian mechanisms. The adoption of cross-border aid resolutions, particularly those regarding extensions or expansion of cross-border aid, has long remained a contentious issue subject to political manipulation, thus often resulting in delayed adoption of resolutions, changes to the cross-border mandate or the humanitarian operations themselves (Office of the Special Representative..., 2025). The political compromise that constrained the cross-border aid to only one point of entry severely constrained the ability of international organisations to respond to needs outside of the territory of Syria controlled by the central government. Consequently, they are operating in a humanitarian environment where humanitarian activity is not only governed by the needs of the civilian population, but also by political decisions. Therefore, ensuring the sustained protection of children and the promotion of child-friendly comprehensive humanitarian programming aimed at preventing and mitigating the harms of armed conflict is complicated.

The use of children by armed groups is the most widespread and reported of all the violations of international humanitarian law in conflict situations. It is generally found in contexts where the security situation is poor and social structures and access to services are lacking. In Syria, child recruitment is a pervasive phenomenon throughout the course of the conflict that encompasses various groups. UNICEF reports that children are recruited into both direct combat roles and non-combat roles such as checkpoint guards, scouts, and couriers. The involvement of children in armed groups spans territories controlled by radical organisations as well as zones under the control of opposition factions or local militia structures (General Assembly Security Council, 2025). However, the data that are publicly available cover only part of the scale of the child recruitment phenomenon, which has become impossible to fully monitor due to access restrictions and uneven intensity of hostilities. Thus, there are many cases of children recruited to various armed groups that are not recorded by international actors until a specific area becomes accessible, and the process of identification and release of children from the armed groups is further complicated.

In Yemen, the scale of the problem is particularly large given the severity of the humanitarian and economic crises, as well as the systemic political and governance breakdown of the state, which creates favourable conditions for child exploitation. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, various armed groups, both state and non-state, including the Houthis, government army, and various militias affiliated with them, have been recruiting children for fighting or support roles (General Assembly Security Council, 2025). A problematic aspect is that children join armed groups not only under duress or coercion but also due to socio-economic motivations, such as a lack of livelihoods, the inaccessibility of education, the loss of

family members, and the absence of protective opportunities. Rights groups reported that children are often coerced into service through ideological pressure, threats, financial inducement, or lies about their future roles. Recruitment frequently goes hand in hand with ideological persuasion, threats, economic enticements, or false promises about the type of duties they will carry out.

This implies, first and foremost, that the current state of international law and international institutional mechanisms in terms of protecting children from armed conflict is not only a necessary condition, but also insufficient for full protection. International actors' effectiveness and thus their ability to prevent and mitigate these violations of children's rights depend on the extent to which they manage to eliminate structural factors of specific conflicts and, accordingly, the limits of use even of the most effective legal instruments. At the same time, there is a need not only to improve international law norms, but also to strengthen the political, diplomatic and operational instruments of international actors and to search for new approaches to their influence on conflict actors in general. At the same time, only a detailed analysis of implementation can lead to a more accurate understanding of the effectiveness of existing legal instruments in specific conflict areas. Therefore, the next section of the article will analyse the international policy practices of Syria and Yemen, where there has been a significant number of violations of children's rights, the influence of external actors and the humanitarian crisis, which makes it possible to assess the capabilities and limitations of global instruments of children's protection.

Comparative analysis of the effectiveness of the international policy of protecting children. Analysis of the patterns of children's rights violations and the international response to those violations in Syria and Yemen shows that a number of comparable elements affect the scale of the humanitarian crisis. Both of these countries have a child demographic that has been hit the hardest by war, breakdown of government institutions, and barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Prolonged hostilities, fragmented territories, and the participation of non-state armed entities have resulted in a situation where child protection standards are only partially applied in practice. In Syria, the humanitarian situation has been characterised by large-scale casualties of children, large population displacements and deterioration of education. This, in turn, has led to long-term consequences of loss of a human resource, as children who have lost access to education are particularly susceptible to exploitation and, as a consequence, exclusion from society. The analysis of recruitment and child exploitation patterns in the above countries reveals the widespread nature of these phenomena, though the patterns of children's engagement differ. In Syria, the process of recruitment is mostly military-political and is carried out by many actors, including the Syrian government, opposition groups, and radical groups (Østby *et al.*, 2023). Children are not only used in active combat, but also as couriers, scouts and guards, highlighting the fact that in long-term civil wars the distinction between civilian and military is very blurred. In Yemen, child recruitment (according to UN data) is even wider and has a significant social and

economic context: children, whose families do not have a decent livelihood, are allowed to serve in the armed forces by their parents, or themselves join them to earn at least some money (UNCT, 2022). Lack of available education and social support also contributes to this, and a new generation of soldiers emerges from childhood.

The international community's response to the human rights consequences of war in Syria and Yemen is based on interaction between UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations, but child protection programmes are in operation under constant limitations in reality. In Syria, mainly international agencies' activity is aimed at education access support, providing psychological help, and health support to children in more or less stable areas or territories where there is a local ceasefire agreement (General Assembly Security Council, 2022). Meanwhile, the large number of rights violations against children is registered in regions where fighting continues, and there is no access to humanitarian workers because of shelling, landmines and the constant struggle for power among different groups. In this case, international organisations can never be in the territory on a regular basis and cannot provide any permanent help

nor have full control over the situation there. The attacks on civilian infrastructure – in particular on schools and hospitals – make the situation even more complicated, when any work with children is usually carried out in these structures, and they become the objects of strikes or are converted for military purposes.

The limitations in planning and conducting international protection of children's rights in areas where military fighting continues are not isolated ones but a systemic problem caused by many factors, including security issues, logistics, and politics. Instability, constant shelling, closing transport routes and the changing front line make humanitarian help sporadic and cause irregular access of children to basic services in different regions. To get more complete picture on the scope of the issue and its structural patterns, a comparative analysis of the main empirical indicators was carried out (Table 2), which makes it possible to see the extent to which these limitations are reflected in the quantitative indicators of humanitarian needs, the access of children to education, and the food security situation in both Syria and Yemen and to further evaluate the effectiveness of international policy in the field of child protection.

Table 2. General overview of the situation of children in Syria and Yemen under conditions of armed conflict, 2025

Analytical dimension	Syria	Yemen
Duration of conflict	Since 2011	Since 2014
Total population in need of assistance	16.7 million people	18.2 million people
Children requiring humanitarian assistance	7.5 million people	9.8 million people
Children out of school	2.45 million children	4.5 million children
Children suffering from severe acute malnutrition	2 million children	537 thousand children
Humanitarian access	Uneven; dependent on cross-border mechanisms and territorial control	Severely restricted; control over ports, airspace, and internal routes
Politicisation of humanitarian assistance	Linked to decisions of the UN Security Council and positions of external actors	Linked to the actions of the coalition and the control exerted by the Houthis
Overall assessment of the child protection environment	High level of risk due to intense hostilities	High level of vulnerability due to humanitarian and economic collapse

Source: compiled by the authors based on M.A. Daw (2021), E.Y.S. Sheikh *et al.* (2022), Office of the Special Representative (2025), UNICEF (2025a; 2025b; n.d.)

Comparing the synthesis of indicators allows the determination of the patterns determining children's vulnerability in Syria and Yemen, as well as the limits to the efficiency of international humanitarian intervention. Although in the case of both countries there was a long period of hostilities and a variety of armed groups, there is a tendency for the cumulative impact of armed hostilities to manifest, in which children's humanitarian needs become a permanent feature and do not relate to the phenomenon of short-term crisis. According to the analysis, the Syrian and Yemeni populations of children have different risk factors, but have the same vulnerability level. In Syria, the immediate results of severe fighting, such as displacement and damage to social infrastructure, determine whether or not children can receive an education or any other services. In Yemen, the human rights and humanitarian aspects, particularly those arising from blockades, food shortages and the breakdown of the healthcare system, are most decisive in creating an environment of insecurity in which

children live. The scale of humanitarian needs in both countries does not correlate with the capacity of international actors to provide systemic, long-term support. The patchy implementation of humanitarian access, combined with the politicisation of aid, means that international programmes are essentially ad-hoc responses to the most visible elements of the crisis. They are not designed to tackle the underlying causes of the conflict. As a result, not all children have access to humanitarian aid, and especially not those children who live in conflict areas or are under the control of certain armed groups.

The USA is still one of the leading donors of global humanitarian assistance, which is especially visible in the Syrian case. From 2011 to 2025, about USD 18 billion were provided to civilian and refugee support (Rayes, 2025). This money went through UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations to support such areas as food security, medical aid, water and sanitation, and very smallscale educational support in the field of humanitarian

aid, which served as the basis for the financial provision of the child protection system. At the same time, the humanitarian role of the USA should be studied together with their political role in Syria. The position of the United States in the UN Security Council, as well as in bilateral formats, was the same: the United States supported sanctions and the diplomatic isolation of the Syrian leadership. Despite some exemptions for humanitarian work, US policies imposed additional legal and financial hurdles for international organisations (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Banking restrictions, complicated authorisation procedures, and fears regarding secondary sanctions slowed the implementation speed and scale of humanitarian programmes, including those aimed at children. As a result, the US position in Syria was characterised by significant financial contributions to the humanitarian component, alongside political leverage tools that indirectly affected the scope of the humanitarian space for sustainable and long-lasting assistance. In the situation in Yemen, the role of the USA had a different significance, but the result for the humanitarian situation remained ambiguous. For the most part, the United States backed the military actions of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition – intelligence, logistics, and armaments. This support affected the military conduct of the war, including the aerial bombardment and the strict implementation of air and sea port blockades, directly impacting the availability of humanitarian supplies. While the USA also funded the work of the UN and UNICEF in Yemen, its support for the coalition led to the existence of programmes that worked in an environment where the military actions significantly limited the overall effectiveness of humanitarian responses and the predictability of these responses (Ahmad & Khawaja, 2025).

The European Union's position on the issue of the protection of children in conflict situations in Syria and Yemen is formulated on a clearly institutionalised level – through official positions, through financial instruments, and through public political statements. As a rule, at the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, the EU acts as a single political group, with its views presented by the delegation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) or the European Member State members of the Council. During the annual open debates of the Security Council on “Children and Armed Conflict”, the EU consistently calls for compliance with Resolutions 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), and 2225 (2015), particularly with regard to ending attacks on schools and hospitals, the release of recruited children, and ensuring unhindered humanitarian access. The effect of the EU on the protection of the rights of the children in Syria and Yemen in the framework of a humanitarian policy, defined normatively and through financial aid and political statements, is limited both due to political compromises, as well as sanctions measures and the lack of direct control over the parties to the conflict. Therefore, the EU is an important player in the formation of the resource base for international child protection programmes, but the realisation of its positions in this area is determined not only by humanitarian priorities, but also by the general geopolitical environment and the decisions of major international players.

Examination of the role of political actors in the protection of children in conflicts in Syria and Yemen shows

that international policy in this area is formed in the context of constant tension between humanitarian and geopolitical factors. The situation in the Syrian and Yemeni cases has a common problematic point, which is the splitting of international vectors. In the cases of the USA and the European Union, financing of humanitarian programmes combines with sanctions and diplomatic policy, forming the legal and practical framework for the functioning of international organisations. At the same time, the policy of the USA and the European Union affects the institutional mechanisms in Syria and Yemen, both through the direct financing of humanitarian programmes and through the creation of institutional and political preconditions for their implementation. Sanctions, conditions for donations, requirements to work with recognised national governments, and support for certain forms of organisation are among several mechanisms through which the political process controls the activities of humanitarian organisations and thereby reduces the autonomy of these actors. In the case of Syria, this has led to a concentration of humanitarian channels within the framework of institutions either fully controlled by the regime or recognised as authorities, while in the case of Yemen, the support of internationally recognised governing structures has led to de jure support of institutions that do not allow, in fact, to provide equal access to the entire territory of the country.

A key effect of this situation is that the international policy on the protection of children in Syria and Yemen is largely reactive. It primarily attempts to alleviate the worst humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Efforts to address the fundamental factors that lead to systematic violations of the rights of children have yet to make significant progress (Alfatlawi, 2025). This contributes to the existence of a fragmented protection system, where access to protection and the level of safety of children largely depend on the political and territorial context. Thus, the limitations of international and regional child protection policies reveal a limited possibility of ensuring effective protection of children in the absence of integration between humanitarian and political approaches that contribute to de-escalating the conflict. The absence of such coordination contributes to the persistence of high levels of vulnerability among children and defines the limits of the effectiveness of international policy in protracted armed conflicts. The limitations of international child protection policy identified in the cases of Syria and Yemen allow the transition from mere analysis of consequences to the more substantive stage of analysing ways to improve it.

The Syrian and Yemeni experiences make it possible to identify a number of key regularities and problematic areas of fundamental importance for future rethinking and improvement of international policy on the protection of children in conflicts. Both situations show that the presence of a sophisticated norms system and many international organisations is not enough by itself to ensure real protection of children if there is no appropriate political, practical and enforcement potential for the adoption of these norms. Here, the crucial factor is not the further accumulation of legal rules, but a rethinking of the methods for their practical implementation in a situation of long-term, fragmented and highly politicised conflicts.

The main point for reforming international policy should be the need to depoliticise humanitarian assistance and to create stronger institutional guarantees of its neutral character. In both Syria and Yemen, humanitarian access has often been used by one side or another as a tool of political pressure or military pressure and aid is provided selectively to different regions of the country or not at all for all children. The blocking of humanitarian corridors, delays in supply delivery, restrictions on the movement of staff and the like prove that the existence of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality is not enough for their effective implementation. The way that international policy on the protection of children is implemented must be reformed to reduce the links between humanitarian and political processes in a conflict setting as much as possible. This involves strengthening the mechanism for coordinating access to independent humanitarian organisations and introducing new procedures that allow the renewal of the humanitarian mandate to take place automatically, regardless of political decisions taken on specific situations. The next important conclusion of this analysis is the inability of existing monitoring mechanisms to provide a comprehensive and representative assessment of the situation regarding the violation of children's rights in the area of active hostilities. In both Syria and Yemen, the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) has proven unable to record a large share of serious violations due to limited access to some areas of operation, serious risks for the safety of the mission's employees and dependence on data from unreliable local sources.

In this case, international policy should also address the insufficient effectiveness of mechanisms for the punishment of violators of children's rights. Despite regular documentation of serious violations and the inclusion of relevant actors in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports, the impact of these actions on the parties to the conflict does not lead to the expected results. In the absence of a specialised international judicial body or procedures for transferring relevant cases to the International Criminal Court for the majority of cases, individual criminal liability for the violation of children's rights has not been applied. The system of sanctions, in most cases, takes a general character and rarely targets individuals or entities whose direct actions led to the use of children in the armed conflict and the attack on schools and hospitals. This underscores the importance of closer coordination between monitoring mechanisms and enforcement tools, particularly through automating sanctions processes when systematic violations are detected under the CAAC framework.

Considering the limitations identified, it seems appropriate to formulate a set of tangible policy recommendations to strengthen international policy on the protection of children's rights in armed conflicts. Of the utmost priority is the depoliticisation of humanitarian aid by establishing autonomous humanitarian access mechanisms, insulated as much as possible from local security situations and diplomatic compromises. In that regard, one option could be establishing automatically renewable humanitarian mandates that would not require renewed political consent at the UN Security Council. Simultaneously, the role of independent coordination bodies should

be expanded to guarantee unhindered access to children in the affected areas, regardless of the prevailing administrative division of territory. The efficiency of international monitoring can be increased by establishing remote methods for data collection and verification, including the use of satellite imagery, the application of geodata, and secure communication lines for testimony collection. These steps will allow for lessening the role of monitoring missions' field presence in conflict zones and filling in the remaining knowledge gaps. There is a need to establish a connection between the monitoring and reporting mechanism and existing mechanisms for international coercion. The implementation of automatic procedures for imposing restrictive measures or transferring information to international courts in cases of serious violations can be one step in this direction. There needs to be a change in the sanctions approach to focus the targeted restrictive measures on specific individuals and entities associated with the recruitment of children or the destruction of civilian infrastructure. At the same time, partnership with local communities and autonomous civil initiatives as a source of initial information and components of the alert system is advisable. Engaging with local participants can bolster the validity and precision of humanitarian monitoring in situations when access for international organisations to the area of operations is restricted.

Summarising the key results from examining the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts, it appears that enhancing international policy on the protection of children in wartime is a task that demands more than a humanitarian-only approach; it calls for a more cohesive and institutional approach. The depoliticisation of humanitarian aid, combined with better monitoring, accountability for breaches of children's rights, and institutional innovations, can be seen as a series of interrelated and complementary measures, rather than isolated, disconnected steps that can produce long-term sustainable results. The practice of Syria and Yemen proves that the use of separate mechanisms (humanitarian programme financing, violations documentation, political appeals) does not contribute to a noticeable decrease in the magnitude of violence against children if the international community does not develop a unified mechanism for their joint use and monitoring. Without such integration, international efforts remain predominantly reactive, focused on mitigating critical humanitarian manifestations such as malnutrition or the lack of access to healthcare and education. However, the root causes of systemic children's rights violations remain largely unaffected by international efforts. As a result, situations where humanitarian needs persist or even grow, despite the long-term stay of the international community and substantial financial expenditures, are created. In this way, it can be clearly seen from the experience of Syria and Yemen how limited the ability of the international system is to cope with today's type of armed violence, which is characterised by a long duration, participation of many parties and the role of non-state actors. And the possibility for the current international organisation to effectively implement and enforce the proclaimed norms of international humanitarian law in situations where political and security interests of states prevail over humanitarian issues is limited.

Discussion

The study of international children's protection policy in armed conflict zones has allowed conclusions that it has formed against the background of constant structural contradiction between universal international legal norms and the breakdown of a military environment. The analysis carried out showed that it was precisely this tension that determined the limits of the practical effectiveness of international mechanisms, as formally binding standards failed to translate into consistent protection practices amidst the collapse of state governance, the proliferation of armed actors and the politicisation of humanitarian access. The value of the study findings is in the ability to step out beyond normative optimism and demonstrate the structural limitations of the current form of international response, in which legal instruments were demonstrated as being dependent on political conditions in the conflict zone.

It is noted in studies by A. Sari (2020) and U. Asghar *et al.* (2025) that the transformation of armed conflicts led to a significant reduction in the possibility of practical application of the principles of the international humanitarian law, despite the fact that it remains universal as a matter of formal rules. A. Sari demonstrated that in the conditions of the rise of the hybrid conflict, "grey zones", and the instrument of law, the international law rules became a tool of contestation of strategies instead of an independent mechanism for the protection of the civilian population. The author notes that in these contexts, the backsliding from multilateralism and decline of international institutions resulted in a loss of the law's operational capacity and necessitated a shift towards the logic of "legal resilience" rather than purely normative regulation. Likewise, U. Asghar *et al.* have demonstrated that the main barriers to applying international humanitarian law in non-international armed conflicts are participation by non-state actors, the asymmetrical character of military conflict, and a lack of meaningful accountability. However, the results of this study revealed an even more pronounced problem. In the cases of Syria and Yemen, these norms function primarily as broad and declarative frameworks. Their application is largely limited to the formal documentation of violations and the political legitimisation of international presence, without translating into stable, on-the-ground practices of child protection. The conclusions of the current research confirm, but also specify, the results of previous studies.

This study refines and expands upon the findings of C. Oberg *et al.* (2023) and A.M. Bolborici (2024), who considered the problems of compliance with children's rights norms and the ability to protect children in conditions of armed conflict. C. Oberg *et al.* noted in their research, despite the extensive list of international documents, declarations, conventions, decisions and court rulings in relation to children's rights in armed conflict, the number of child casualties, victims, and their psychological traumatising has not decreased in recent decades, but has been on the rise. A.M. Bolborici has shown that although international humanitarian law establishes a guaranteed protection for children without regard to their status, its realisation depends in considerable measure on the possibility of states, international organisations and non-state

actors to coordinate in the conditions of war. The findings of this study confirm these points, whilst illustrating them with examples from Syria and Yemen. Conducted analysis showed that in conditions of breakdown of state institutions, loss of territorial control and fragmentation of power structures, a developed system of international institutions of protection is not able to give practical effect to legal norms.

The conclusions of G. Bartolini & S. Pouloupoulou (2025) and C. Aptel *et al.* (2025) on the institutional dimension of the Children and Armed Conflict agenda have also been developed by the current study. In contrast to previous studies, which focused primarily on the normative reporting architecture or the evolution of individual institutional tools, this study has considered the operation of the whole CAAC machinery in two distinct yet similar complex conflict environments. In line with G. Bartolini & S. Pouloupoulou's observations, reporting under the auspices of international humanitarian law has historically been patchy in nature, and has yet to be integrated within systematic mechanisms of periodic national monitoring, as is the case in other international legal regimes. This research has contributed to the argument that accountability fragmentation in Syria and Yemen is determined by a lack of institutional resources and political circumstances that dictate access to territory, by parties' willingness to cooperate selectively and unequal allocation of responsibilities between state and non-state parties.

M. Eleftheriadou (2021) and S. Baroud *et al.* (2024) note that the existence of a high degree of actor fragmentation in armed conflicts resulted in the conditional and selective nature of the humanitarian norms based on the configuration of political power, external support, and the stakes of interested parties. The findings of this study were consistent with these conclusions, but at the same time refined them, showing that in the cases of Syria and Yemen, the selectivity of humanitarian norms has been, more than an episode, a systematic feature of its normative environment, which has been deeply ingrained in the configuration of the existing politico-military order. This was confirmed by the finding that the fulfilment of obligations to protect children depended heavily on the tactical interests of the parties to the conflict, the control regimes over territories and competition between external actors, rather than on the formal legal binding nature of the norms of international humanitarian law. This study examined these points from a comparative perspective by arguing that selectivity of humanitarian norms in a fragmented conflict should not be considered as an exception but rather as a characteristic of the war environment.

It is also worth mentioning that in conducted analysis, the success of international humanitarian intervention is defined, more than by the extent of the international legal obligations, by access to territory, and the extent of destruction of the infrastructural environment. The findings obtained are broadly consistent with the approaches of F. Guiziou (2024) and M. Alkhalil *et al.* (2024), who emphasised spatial and logistical constraints as a key determinant of humanitarian effectiveness. Guiziou, in his analysis of the container terminal of the Port of Al-Hudaydah, showed that war and active hostilities affected infrastructure in different ways: long-term consequences

manifested through the degradation of transport links and the “erosion” of the hinterland, whereas the immediate proximity of the front line and the blocking of roads caused short- and medium-term paralysis of access. These findings resonate with the results of the present study, which established that in Yemen, it was precisely the blockade of ports and transport hubs that generated a critical level of vulnerability for children, irrespective of formally applicable humanitarian norms. Similarly, M. Alkhalil *et al.* showed by means of the Syrian case that even the enhanced cooperation of donors after the introduction of the Whole of Syria approach has led to actual assistance still depending on access to the territories of the cross-border corridors defined in the UN Security Council resolutions. The findings of this study have clarified these points, suggesting that in Syria, the hostilities, shelling, and the closed access routes to the cross-border corridors have resulted in systemic barriers to the implementation of the institutional and financial instruments of the assistance. The findings of current research suggest that under the same international legal obligations, the configuration of spatial and logistical and infrastructural conditions creates different profiles of child vulnerability in Syria and Yemen, with access to territories serving as one of the critical determinants for the practical realisation of international humanitarian policy.

Conducted analysis of the conflicts allowed for further refinement and specification of findings formulated in the studies of A. Abbata *et al.* (2021) and F. Dureab *et al.* (2021) emphasised the politicisation and instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid in the context of protracted armed conflict. In their examination of healthcare system fragmentation in Syria, A. Abbata *et al.* established that protracted war had disintegrated a unified institutional space and the formation of a number of subnational systems, which were not primarily guided by humanitarian requirements, but instead by geopolitical, financial and administrative factors. In spite of the fact that the authors limited themselves to the Syrian case, their general conclusions on the politicisation of humanitarian sectors were not without broader explanatory value. Similarly, in their research conducted within the Yemeni context, F. Dureab *et al.* established that the humanitarian catastrophe was the result of military conflict, not the sole outcome, but of the fall of the central authority, the division of power, corruption, the emergence of the so-called “war economy” and of humanitarian aid, which became a political and economic factor of control. In the study presented here, the results were not only consistent with those conclusions but also refined with particular regard to the child protection sphere. The findings of the research presented that in Yemen, assistance was carried out under systemic corruption, diversion and biased political access to aid, thus contributing to the reproduction of violations of children’s rights regardless of the changing dynamics of war.

The impact of humanitarian policy on security and diplomatic compromises, and the consequences for the autonomy of humanitarian action in armed conflict, were examined by Ü. Seven (2024) and L. Falqui *et al.* (2024). In particular, in the case of Syria, Ü. Seven demonstrated that, due to the use of violence, as well as the imposition of administrative and bureaucratic restrictions by the

state, a gradual recapture of humanitarians by the regime took place, and the international organisations, including UN agencies, were forced to carry out activities within the framework of the regime’s sovereignty. The author found that in these conditions, rather than being rejected, the humanitarian principles were reinterpreted by the state, in its interaction with the humanitarians, which in turn altered the balance of power and limited the space for independent protection of groups of concern, including children. In turn, L. Falqui *et al.*, when examining the relationship between global health diplomacy and humanitarian action in the situation of fragility and violence, highlighted the fact that humanitarian decisions are increasingly formed at the point of intersection of agreements and negotiations. Based on the cases of Yemen and other crisis-affected areas, it was revealed that the availability of assistance, the size and focus of interventions and response were mainly determined by the actors’ ability to reach a compromise between governments, rather than just humanitarian needs. In this way, the results of the present research build upon these approaches, which made it possible to systematically examine the role of geopolitical interests in shaping the policy of international child protection in Syria and Yemen. Analysis revealed that the positions of the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, as well as rivalry between the USA, the EU, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, have created multilevel constraints on the activity of humanitarian institutions, prioritising conflict regulation and fragile stability over the systematic fulfilment of human rights commitments. The research identified that this disintegration of the international response is not random, but systematic. Child protection has been carried out via a number of uncoordinated mechanisms, while coordination has often been secondary to the interests of important political actors.

Findings of this study made it possible to relate W.A. Solf’s (2012) argument about the change in institutional systems of international humanitarian law to arguments about the Children and Armed Conflict agenda functioning as well as L. Daniele’s (2024) critical view on the effect of the system of structural anarchy and distorted norms on the actual level of civilian protection. W.A. Solf showed that humanitarian law historically developed as the result of a gradual codification of customary rules of war aimed at limiting the means and methods of warfare and preserving a clear distinction between civilian and military objects. The author emphasised that the effectiveness of these norms has always depended on the extent of their acceptance as binding and on the existence of command responsibility for minimising harm to civilian populations. L. Daniele, in turn, points to the fact that in today’s wars, the basic principles of humanitarian law are undermined by the decline in the concept of harm to the civilian population, as well as a broad understanding of proportionality, thus legitimising the increased volume of violence against civilians. The findings of this study resonate with these arguments while also allowing them to be refined on the basis of the Syrian and Yemeni cases. According to conducted research, institutional mechanisms, even if they are formally created, lose practical efficiency in conditions of insufficient coordination and geopolitical competition. In the situation described by W.A. Solf, legal norms remain codified and universal,

but under the condition of multilateral and asymmetric conflict, they lose their deterrent function. Like in the case argued by L. Daniele, the results showed that a selective approach to the principles of proportionality and incidental harm allows for politically motivated approaches to their implementation in which harm to the civilian population, including children, becomes a “collateral” consequence of military actions acceptable to parties to the conflict.

To conclude, the results of this study coincide with academic research that identifies the contradictions between the universal character of international humanitarian law and its effective implementation during armed conflicts. It is confirmed that in the situations of Syria and Yemen, the effectiveness of international child protection policy depends not so much on the completeness of legal standards, but rather on the political and military configuration of the belligerents, the territorial presence, as well as the level of politicisation of humanitarian aid. The consistency of these findings with previous research highlighting the institutional and political constraints on CAAC and MRM mechanisms has helped to clarify the understanding that these constraints are systemic rather than situational. Such an analysis made it possible to specify the concept of the problem: child protection policy in prolonged conflict is not about norm scarcity but about long-term vulnerability, which leads to unequal and uneven child protection outcomes in the field.

Conclusions

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of international policy for protecting children’s rights in the situation of armed conflict, with a focus on the example of Syria and Yemen, focusing on the interaction of law and norms, the functioning of institutional mechanisms, and the conditions for their practical implementation. The results of this research show that in the presence of a developed international legal regime and institutional systems, the practical effectiveness of child protection policy in Syria and Yemen remains limited. It has been established that the main factors contributing to the inefficiency are the fragmentation of power and the inaccessibility of the territories, including access by humanitarian and monitoring organisations, as well as the systemic politicisation of humanitarian access by both conflict parties and external actors. The comparative analysis has shown that in Syria, the key factor of the crisis is the multifaceted military and political nature of the conflict and the dependence of humanitarian mechanisms on the decisions of the UN Security Council, and in Yemen, these are the consequences of economic blockades of humanitarian access, logistical control, as well as high levels of malnutrition, disease, and

child recruitment. The study also demonstrated that in both conflicts, the international response takes the form of a reaction to humanitarian crises, focusing on mitigating the most acute humanitarian consequences without addressing the structural drivers of systemic violations of children’s rights. The authors identified that the actions of actors and the activities of actors, including permanent UN Security Council members, the USA and the European Union, often have a combination of humanitarian activities with geopolitics, and this affects the predictability and neutrality of humanitarian mechanisms. In this context, child protection emerges not merely as a humanitarian imperative but as a derivative of broader political compromises and strategic calculations.

The presented results indicate that in order to increase the effectiveness of the international policy on the protection of children in armed conflicts, there is a need for the following measures. It is important to ensure the depoliticisation of humanitarian assistance, strengthen mechanisms for recording violations in territories not under government control and establish closer connections between the recording of violations and concrete instruments for accountability. In particular, it was proposed to increase the mandate and capacity of existing mechanisms in the field of child protection, to ensure the security of educational and medical infrastructure and to use digital tools for monitoring, analysis and verification.

A limitation of the study was its reliance on official statistics and reports from international organisations, which do not always reflect the full extent of violations in restricted-access areas. This research demonstrates that the effectiveness of international child protection policy in armed conflict does not depend solely on the existence of a normative basis, institutional mechanisms for the implementation of norms, but also on political will and capabilities for the implementation of these mechanisms. One of the perspectives is to explore the impact of the proposed institutional innovations on improving the situation of children in armed conflicts, as well as to assess changes in the current global security architecture on the situation and effectiveness of humanitarian organisations in protracted conflicts.

Acknowledgements

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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