

Discussion Series 2: “Security Risk Management Practices for Humanitarian Organizations” (20 April 2021) – Summary report

The EU, together with the missions of Norway, Niger, Mexico, Switzerland, Germany, and France in New York, is organizing a series of discussions on “[Ensuring the protection, safety, and security of humanitarian workers and medical personnel in armed conflicts](#)”. The Discussion series aims to identify main challenges and to bring forward practical solutions.

The second meeting of the Discussion Series, “Security risk management practices for humanitarian organizations”, co-chaired by the EU and Niger, took place on 20 April. The meeting welcomed around 120 participants, including representatives of 50 Member States, key humanitarian stakeholders, and local implementing partners from Syria, Somalia, and South Sudan (list attached). Participants reflected on existing security risk management (SRM) practices, and their implications across different humanitarian sectors, i.e. at the UN and at the international and local NGO level. They also discussed the fundamental role of Member States in ensuring effective security management for humanitarian organizations, specifically ensuring the safety and security of locally recruited personnel under the current localization agenda.

Participants agreed that while working in difficult and unpredictable environments will always carry a degree of risk, donors, governments, and organizations can do much to develop a safer and more secure working environment for humanitarian personnel. All humanitarian actors, regardless of size, have a duty of care obligation towards their personnel. Donors have an obligation to ensure that implementing partners have the resources they need, and are free of unduly onerous bureaucratic constraints, to improve staff safety, while governments have a duty to uphold international law and humanitarian principles and take all feasible measures to support safe humanitarian access and humanitarian staff.

Humanitarian security risk management, when coupled with effective policies and practices by states, allows greater access to and impact for crisis-affected populations. The aim of security risk management is to carry out operations to enable organizations to reach those most in need, whilst protecting their personnel and fulfilling their duty of care. Security risk management is about enabling organizations to meet their objectives while managing security risks to personnel to be at an acceptable level. It is thus not about being risk averse, but about managing risks.

Alongside the localization agenda, participants agreed the need to move from ‘Risk transfer’ (donors and international humanitarian agencies expect local partners to manage risk) to ‘Risk sharing’ that refers to the concept of shifting towards a more partnership-based approach to understanding, managing and mitigating risk.

This summary report acts as the second element of an outcome document, which will lay out avenues for concrete further action, stemming from recommendations compiled throughout the entire Discussion Series.

Current practices, challenges, and key areas for action:

A key takeaway from the Discussion Series' first meeting on "Monitoring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel" is that data is essential in ensuring the protection, safety, and security of humanitarian and medical personnel. Data is critical to understand complex security environments, make risk assessments and steer mitigation processes, and at the same time allow organizations to deliver in high-risk contexts. The current challenge to ensure full data-efficacy lies in difficult data collection processes, which must be transformed to incorporate the use of technology and innovation, and to promote collaboration and data-sharing.

An effective security risk management starts with well-designed humanitarian programs, adequate security resources in program-planning, good leadership, strong personal and organizational resilience, strong context analysis and effective communication. SRM also entails engaging with local authorities, including non-state armed groups, and members of the community. In this perspective, linking security management approaches and systems with efforts to promote community engagement and accountability to affected populations is fundamental to an effective security strategy. Following a risk-sharing approach, this system relies on flow of knowledge and assets to those involved in humanitarian action.

The discussion showed that there is little security risk management support specifically for local actors. The dominance of short-term, project-based partnerships often prevents local NGOs from receiving strategic and sustainable support for security risk management. Their reduced timeframe and scope of engagement are not conducive to building relationships of trust between partners and may impede mutual understanding. In contrast, local NGOs expressed their appreciation of humanitarian actors that commit to the long-term, engage with the context, are flexible with budgets and support, and invest in building a trusting relationship.

From a local organization's perspective, one of the main challenges to ensure full SRM is the insufficient capacity to understand risk, including a lack of resources to run organization-wide systems for recording and analyzing incidents, which prevents them from using this insight to inform their security risk strategy. Lack of funding, technology, data management systems and training create security challenges for local organizations, compounded by the dangers of transferring the risk to local humanitarian actors without providing adequate support. This could be mitigated by implementing the localization agenda, highlighted in Germany and France's [Humanitarian Call for Action](#).

SRM is a shared responsibility between international and local humanitarian organizations, donors, and states. In fact, the role of states is key in preserving the humanitarian space and keeping a balance with their own security imperatives. States play a defining role in ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian and medical staff, as decisions made by States and their foreign policy/military engagement can have a direct impact on the safety of humanitarian and medical operations. This reflection should be taken into account when implementing the Triple Nexus in complex settings to avoid undermining the neutrality of humanitarian action.

Best Practices and practical recommendations to reduce obstacles to security management:

1. **Security Risk Management should be integrated at all stages and in all programs and mandates.** This would increase the general awareness for the importance of security among the staff at HQ and in the field.
 - Effective security risk management starts with well-designed humanitarian programs, adequate security resources in program-planning, good leadership, strong personal and organizational resilience, strong context analysis and effective communication.
 - Humanitarian actors should invest in context and stakeholder analysis and medium - to long-term, clearly articulated access and acceptance strategies and should improve understanding of IHL and the principles guiding humanitarian action among states and non-state armed groups.
 - Systematically connect security management approaches and systems with efforts at community engagement and accountability to affected populations (AAP).
 - Recent work has identified the need to take a more 'person-centered' approach in exercising duty of care. Security management is one aspect of duty of care obligations to humanitarian personnel and it cannot be met if security risk management planning is based on a 'standard aid worker'
 - Donors should discuss and agree on minimum standards on SRM to be implemented by their partners while working in highly volatile security environments.

2. **Enhance data-sharing mechanisms:** Humanitarian organizations and in particular local actors must have timely access to available information and resources to enable accurate risk-assessment and decision-making, and thus ensure effective SRM. International NGOs should encourage their local partners to register with existing platforms (see annex). Formalized systems through which local actors can engage and express their positions should be established and INGOs must work with States and non-UN partners to share knowledge and best practices.

In this regard, and as already reflected in the first of the discussion series, more structured approach by donor community in supporting humanitarian security platforms will be welcomed: Donors should harmonize more their scattered efforts and budget allocation towards humanitarian security platforms. Supporting such organizations can create a multiplication effect in enhancing the protection of humanitarian workers.

3. **Use a risk sharing approach to SRM:** The consensus among participants was that SRM must shift from a risk-transfer to a risk-sharing approach to improve overall SRM in the humanitarian context. This requires donors to foster an open dialogue and collaboration with partners, especially with local, less-resourced, and limited capacity organizations, and to develop capacity-building programs to improve knowledge of and training on SRM strategies.

4. **Funding:** Investments in security are essential. Well-trained staff is needed in HQ and the field. Donors should agree that a percentage of the project or programme budgets would go to security in the implementation of the programs.

Ensure proper long-term funding for organizations to undertake appropriate and effective SRM: donors should ensure that implementing partners have the resources they need to ensure and improve staff safety. Therefore, donors must invest in the security of humanitarian organizations, including in the translation of training materials into local languages; fund new information technologies; and reinforce the provision of digital technologies for local humanitarian organizations. Donors should also simplify grant application processes and provide clear guidelines for funding requirements.

5. **Implement the localization agenda** and consider the differing dangers faced by local humanitarian workers. Existing data platforms must prioritize the localization agenda to strengthen the capacity and involvement of local actors. Localization is dependent on local participation and both SRM and localization should be informed by field perspectives. As such, effective SRM and localization require effective and sustainable support mechanisms.
6. **Ensure compliance with IHL and Humanitarian Principles and tackle impunity:** States must engage with local authorities and community members to investigate attacks and their perpetrators and strengthen overall accountability and monitoring systems. Host governments have a duty to uphold IHL and to take all feasible measures to support humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian staff. IHL capacity building for non-state armed groups must also be enhanced. Policymakers should elevate the protection of humanitarian workers at the national policy level. Language around the security and protection of aid workers must be strengthened in peacekeeping mandates.

The third meeting of the Discussions Series, co-chaired by the EU, Mexico, and Switzerland, will take place on 19 May (11 am) and will focus on preventing and countering the criminalization of humanitarian work and preserving the humanitarian space.

Annex: Key stakeholders and resources

Stakeholders

The **International NGO Safety Organization (INSO)** is an international charity that supports the safety of aid workers in high-risk contexts through its field coordination platforms. INSO provides its +1,000 registered NGO partners with a range of free services including real-time incident tracking, analytical reports, safety related data and mapping, crisis management support, staff orientations and training.

The **Global Interagency Security Forum** (formerly EISF) is a member-led NGO forum that drives change through their global network of over 125-member organizations. They influence good security risk management practice that works for the whole humanitarian sector, improving the security of aid workers and operations for sustainable access.

Humanitarian Outcomes is an independent research organization providing evidence and policy advice to inform better humanitarian action. They notably run the Aid Worker Security Database, its associated reports and alerts, the Survey on Coverage, Operational Reach, and Effectiveness (SCORE), the SCORE database, and the country specific reports on access. Together with InterAction, and a group of participant NGOs, they conducted the NGOs and Risk study, which focused on risk management for local partners.

Insecurity Insight examines threats facing people living and working in dangerous environments. Insecurity Insight issues bi-monthly news briefs on Aid Security and offers Situation Reports for selected countries that also include overviews of how violence affects the health, education, and protection sectors. Insecurity Insight's data is available on the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX). Insecurity Insight's work supports security focal points in Security Incident Information Management (SIIM), the process of recording, analysis and using security incidents for security risk management.

INSSA is a non-profit global membership association of individuals committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of safety and security for humanitarian relief and development assistance workers operating in complex and dangerous environments.

Resources

The [Saving Lives Together](#) (SLT) is a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing UN and NGO security collaboration in the field. Under the SLT framework, the UN and the humanitarian community cooperate in the collection, analysis and dissemination of critical security and safety information, while operational decisions made based on such information remains the responsibility of the respective organizations.

[To Stay and Deliver, Five Years On](#) study, published in 2017 by OCHA, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Jindal School of International Affairs, reviews and analyses the impact of the landmark study [To Stay and Deliver](#) (published in 2011) on policy and operations in highly

insecure environments. The study looks at a host of issues, including the importance of acceptance strategies, the impact of remote-management strategies, shortcomings in programming criticality exercises, and the link between security and humanitarian programming.

Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective paper seeks to: a) provide insight into L/NNGOs' security risk management cultures, perceptions, capacities, practices, needs and expectations in their partnerships with INGOs; b) establish a platform for L/NNGOs to share their views and enhance dialogue between international and local/national NGOs; c) identify opportunities to improve the effectiveness of support in partnerships as well as shared understandings of security risks.

Saving Lives and Staying Alive: Humanitarian Security in the Age of Risk Management, from Michaël Neuman and Fabrice Weissman, 2016, published in the Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict (2016, pages 69-70).

The Security Incident Information Management (SIIM) handbook, produced by RedR, GISF and Insecurity Insight, available in Arabic, French, English, and Spanish.