Actor mapping and context analysis

Before deployment or starting programme

Context analysis and actor mapping

- What is the context and who are the actors?
- What impact will your organisation and programmes have on the context and actors?

Risk assessment

- What are the threats you face? What are your vulnerabilities to those threats?
- What is the probability and impact of risks?

Security strategies

Acceptance, protection and deterrence

- Understand your organisational approach: what strategies do you use generally and in this context in particular?

Security plan

- NGO security coordination and other sources of support

Within first 1-2 weeks

Standard Operating Procedures

(How staff will mitigate the threats identified in the risk assessment)

- Contingency plans

(How management will respond to anticipated situations)

Ongoing improvement

Office/compound/facility security

- Hibernation, relocation and evacuation

Communications and information security

- Medical support and evacuation

Travel safety: Airports/vehicles/other
Mapping the different actors in the operating environment and analysing the context are both key activities for organisations moving into a new country/area/region, or starting a new programme or project. It is also essential when a major disruption to the status quo has happened in a familiar operational context.

In recent years, NGOs have been ordered out of countries, or their staff sentenced or imprisoned, despite the state’s urgent humanitarian needs, because someone made a simple social mistake, offended a host government, or started work without properly gaining acceptance by both formal and informal leadership structures. It is strongly advised to start an actor mapping and context analysis as early as possible and continue the process throughout the programme duration.

Who are the key individuals, groups, organisations, state institutions and other stakeholders that can affect your security and operations? What is their political and/or social position, power, background and relation to or interest in the organisation?

**Actor mapping**

Actor mapping is an exercise to identify all the key individuals, stakeholders or other organisations that will have an effect on the operating environment. They can include:

- Host government ministers, department heads or similar
- Opposition figures, groups or key supporters
- Host government security officials (military, police, other)
- Donors
- UN agencies and their contact points
- Community leaders
- Formal and informal leaders in the operating region
- Other NGOs, both national and international
- Key business individuals who may control local supply and logistics
- Local media
- Beneficiary groups
- Host communities
- Others

Remember, when doing an actor mapping the declared interests of an individual or group may be very different to their actual interests.
Once the key actors are identified, it is important to understand how they link together and where interacting with one may influence relations with another. Think about how they are connected – which actors are allied and which in conflict, for example – as well as how these relationships may be affected by the presence of the organisation and the programmes to be implemented.

**Context analysis**

The analysis of the context builds on the actor mapping exercise by examining as many factors related to the context as are available. They can include:

- History, both recent and distant
- Cultural and religious traditions that may differ between urban and rural areas
- Racial, tribal or political alliances
- Socio-economic factors
- Infrastructure conditions
- Level of security or insecurity and contributing factors
- Attitudes to foreigners (western, diaspora or regional)
- Attitudes to aid agencies
- Governance issues
- Corruption
- Impact of arriving NGOs, other than programming, on local social, economic and power relationships
- Other factors
In writing a context analysis, you can use the PESTLE format:
- Politics
- Economics
- Social
- Technological
- Legal
- Environmental

Actor mapping and context analysis may be challenging when responding quickly to a new environment. Identifying all the actors and stakeholders can be difficult enough, without trying to establish power relationships or behind the scenes motivations. It is important to include as many perspectives as possible into the actor mapping and context analysis. Different ethnicities, ages and genders may have distinct understanding of drivers and relationships of the context.

Finding good sources of local knowledge, while being aware of bias, is a good first step, but also research other organisations or individuals who have recently worked in the context and interview them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible support</th>
<th>Likely support</th>
<th>Sources of threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security Forces</td>
<td>State actors</td>
<td>Criminal gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local business interests</td>
<td>UN agencies</td>
<td>Terrorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal leaders</td>
<td>Community leaders</td>
<td>Armed groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local media</td>
<td>Other NGOs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition actors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the early stages of a new response, the actor mapping and context analysis should be regularly updated as more information becomes known. The outputs of this process should be maintained as confidentially as possible from a management perspective to avoid upsetting local sensibilities. Also, it is important to not be seen as gathering ‘intelligence’, so management of the information and how it is employed and shared should be closely monitored.

See Module 8 – Communications and information security
## Contents

### Introduction

### Modules

#### Planning and preparedness

- **Module 1**  
  Security risk management planning process

- **Module 2**  
  Actor mapping and context analysis

- **Module 3**  
  Risk assessment tool

- **Module 4**  
  Security strategies: acceptance, protection and deterrence

- **Module 5**  
  NGO security coordination and other sources of support

- **Module 6**  
  Security plan

- **Module 7**  
  Security of facilities

- **Module 8**  
  Communications and information security

- **Module 9**  
  Travel safety: airports, vehicles and other means of transport

#### Response

- **Module 10**  
  Hibernation, relocation and evacuation

- **Module 11**  
  Medical support and evacuation

#### Support services

- **Module 12**  
  People management

#### Glossary

#### Other EISF publications
European Interagency Security Forum (EISF)

EISF is an independent network of Security Focal Points who currently represent 85 Europe-based humanitarian NGOs operating internationally. EISF is committed to improving the security of relief operations and staff. It aims to increase safe access by humanitarian agencies to people affected by emergencies. Key to its work is the development of research and tools which promote awareness, preparedness and good practice.

EISF was created to establish a more prominent role for security risk management in international humanitarian operations. It facilitates exchange between member organisations and other bodies such as the UN, institutional donors, academic and research institutions, the private sector, and a broad range of international NGOs. EISF’s vision is to become a global reference point for applied practice and collective knowledge, and key to its work is the development of practical research for security risk management in the humanitarian sector.

EISF is an independent entity currently funded by the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Department for International Development (DFID) and member contributions.

www.eisf.eu

Acknowledgements

The first edition of this guide, published in 2015, was developed jointly by James Davis (Act Alliance) and Lisa Reilly, Executive Coordinator of the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF). The project manager of the first edition was Raquel Vazquez Llorente, Researcher at EISF.

Module 12 – People management was developed by Christine Williamson. The project manager was Adelicia Fairbanks, Research Advisor at EISF.

The European Interagency Security Forum and the authors would like to thank the following individuals for sharing their expertise with us: Marko Szilveszter Macskovich (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Michelle Betz (Betz Media Consulting), Veronica Kenny-Macpherson (Cosantóir Group), Jean Michel Emeryk, Peter Wood, Shaun Bickley, William Carter, Rebekka Meissner and Christine Newton.

Suggested citation


Disclaimer

EISF is a member-led grouping and has no separate legal status under the laws of England and Wales or any other jurisdiction, and references to “EISF” in this disclaimer shall mean the member agencies, observers and secretariat of EISF.

While EISF endeavours to ensure that the information in this document is correct, EISF does not warrant its accuracy and completeness. The information in this document is provided ‘as is’, without any conditions, warranties or other terms of any kind, and reliance upon any material or other information contained in this document shall be entirely at your own risk. Accordingly, to the maximum extent permitted by applicable law, EISF excludes all representations, warranties, conditions and other terms which, but for this legal notice, might have effect in relation to the information in this document. EISF shall not be liable for any kind of loss or damage whatsoever to you or a third party arising from reliance on the information contained in this document.

© 2017 European Interagency Security Forum