

DEMYSTIFYING SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

Adelicia Fairbanks, Research Advisor, of European Interagency Security Forum (EISF), discusses implementing an effective framework

During the first nine months of 2016, open sources reported 487 aid staff killed, kidnapped, injured or assaulted.

That is 60% more than the same period in 2015 according to information gathered by Insecurity Insight. Overall, trend analyses report an increase in aid worker casualties over recent years, which many attribute to the changing perceptions of aid workers and the new dynamics of conflicts. This may, in part, also be due to better reporting and an overall increase in the number of aid staff employed. These considerations aside, the fact remains that aid workers face serious security risks when travelling and working overseas, particularly in high-risk countries such as Syria, Yemen, and South Sudan. This is a significant challenge for all humanitarian and development non-governmental organisations (NGOs), large and small.

NGOs with sufficient resources and senior management investment have steadily improved their security risk management over the years. For many NGOs, security risk assessments, security

plans, travel security procedures, security training, and incident reporting systems are now a key part of their modus operandi. To a smaller NGO, such mechanisms may seem excessive or too costly to implement. It is important to highlight, however, that regardless of size, all NGOs have a duty of care obligation towards their staff.

EISF recognises the challenges that smaller NGOs face when trying to improve their security risk management, particularly due to the fact that they must operate with limited resources, both financially and in terms of personnel, which make it more challenging to improve organisational security knowledge and to implement plans and measures to mitigate the risks staff face.

In an effort to support NGOs with limited resources, EISF is developing a guide, authored by Shaun Bickley, that aims to demystify security risk management. The guide provides a framework which breaks down what this entails: from governance and travel management to capacity building and crisis management.

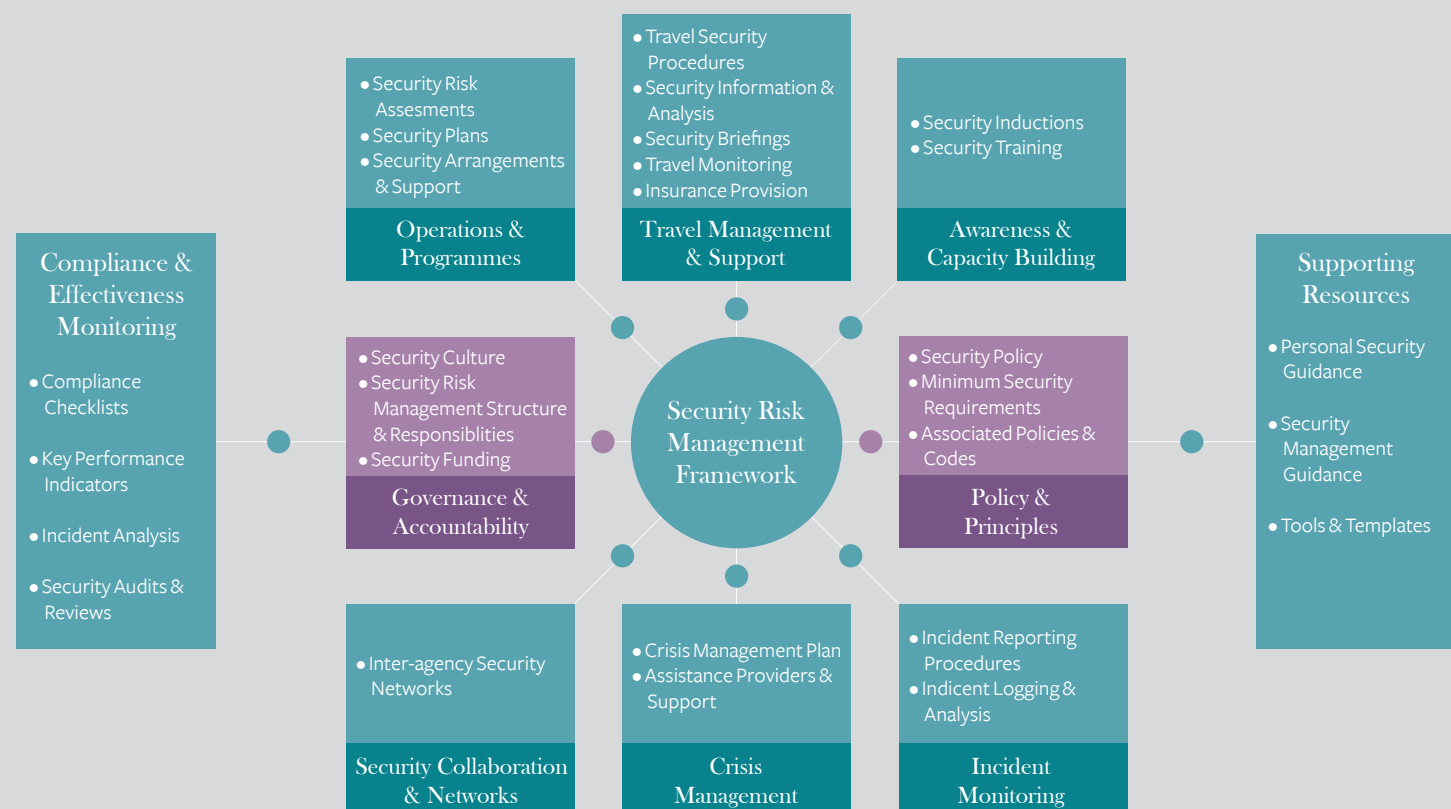
Security Risk Management Framework

The first step towards establishing an effective system to safeguard staff is to develop a security risk management (SRM) framework. A basic SRM framework is one integrated system with two overarching elements:

- The foundations, made up of the security risk management structure, policy and principles, and minimum requirements; and
- The mechanisms, which include the various security procedures, plans, activities, and supporting resources used to manage security risks to staff.

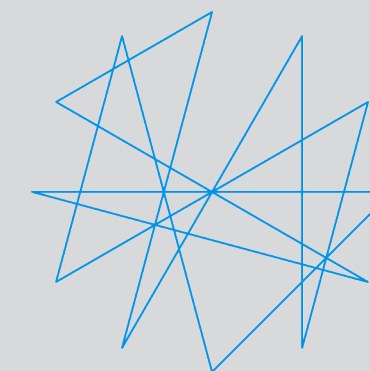
It is essential that this framework is based not only on an organisation's mission and mandate but is also embedded within the organisation's programmes.

This diagram shows the different elements of an SRM framework, two of which will be discussed in more depth in this article.



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Governance

The cost of resourcing security risk management can be daunting. Despite this, it is worth noting that in most cases the cost of dealing with an incident far outweighs the investment of preventing it from occurring in the first place.

Nonetheless, for smaller NGOs, limited capacity and funding are often perceived as major barriers to addressing security risks effectively. However, there are many aspects of security risk management that do not require significant time or large security budgets. There are numerous open source risk management templates, tools and resources available from platforms like EISF and InterAction. In addition, there are many free online courses that can assist in raising the security level for aid workers.

Developing a security culture within an organisation is more about the attitude and behaviour of senior staff than implementing intricate systems.

Travel Management

Whether visiting programmes or attending meetings and events, aid workers regularly travel to high-risk locations. When aid workers travel outside of their regular work environment, their exposure to various security, safety and health risks often increases, as do organisations' duty of care responsibilities.

Travel risks for staff can be exacerbated in countries where an organisation has little or no organisational presence. Limited contextual knowledge and up-to-date information on threats that exist, combined with no security plans and networks in place, increase the risks for travelling staff. This may be the type of situation a smaller NGO frequently faces.

To support with this, smaller NGOs can make use of the travel risk ratings provided by the security risk management company linked to their travel insurance or travel booking service. Alternatively, various open source travel risk ratings are available via embassy travel sites or other website providers.

Conclusion

At first glance, security risk management can appear daunting. However, it need not be as complex or as costly as one might initially suppose. The framework that EISF's upcoming guide will discuss in detail highlights the building blocks required to improve NGO staff security, and there are many resources available free of cost to support organisations wanting to improve their security risk management.

However, the first and most important step organisations can take to increase aid worker security is to help staff understand that following security procedures is not a barrier to carrying out their aid activities, but rather enables them to have greater access to beneficiaries.

About EISF

EISF is an independent network of security focal points that represent European-based humanitarian NGOs operating internationally. EISF is committed to improving the safety and security of operations and staff, as well as strengthening humanitarian security risk management in order to achieve greater access to, and impact for, crisis-affected populations.

The independent EISF network was formalised in early 2008 and currently has more than 85 members from across the sector. As an NGO-led forum, the EISF hub reflects the needs of our members and those of the broader humanitarian security risk management network. The EISF Secretariat works in collaboration with its members to produce original research, arrange biannual forum meetings and regular workshops, and facilitate information sharing between members and the wider NGO community.

EISF also acts as a resource for others interested in security risk management in the humanitarian sector. To learn more about what we do or to access some of the tools and resources mentioned in this article, please visit www.eisf.eu.