Security Risk Management Toolkit: Hibernation, Relocation, Evacuation

READY to go
Mobile Guide

Learn how to develop contingency plans to respond to significant changes in the security threat context and take appropriate actions for the hibernation, relocation, and evacuation of employees.

Contingency Planning

Note to Learners

The information in this guide is for educational purposes only; it is not intended to be a substitute for professional or specialist security advice. Any reliance you place on such information is therefore at your own risk and the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) will have no responsibility or liability under any circumstances.

Reacting to Changes in the Threat Context

Local and international aid organizations often work in regions where natural disasters or conflict threaten the human environment. It is critical for organizations and staff to be prepared and know how to respond when a situation or the working environment becomes unsafe for a short or extended period of time. There are typically three levels of reaction to a significant change in the threat context: **Hibernation**, **Relocation**, and **Evacuation**.

Hibernation

During a crisis period, there is a temporary stop to programming. Staff stay at home, or in some circumstances, they may be required to take shelter in the office or compound.

Relocation

Program teams move offices and/or activities from an unsafe area to a safer location, usually temporarily and within the same country.
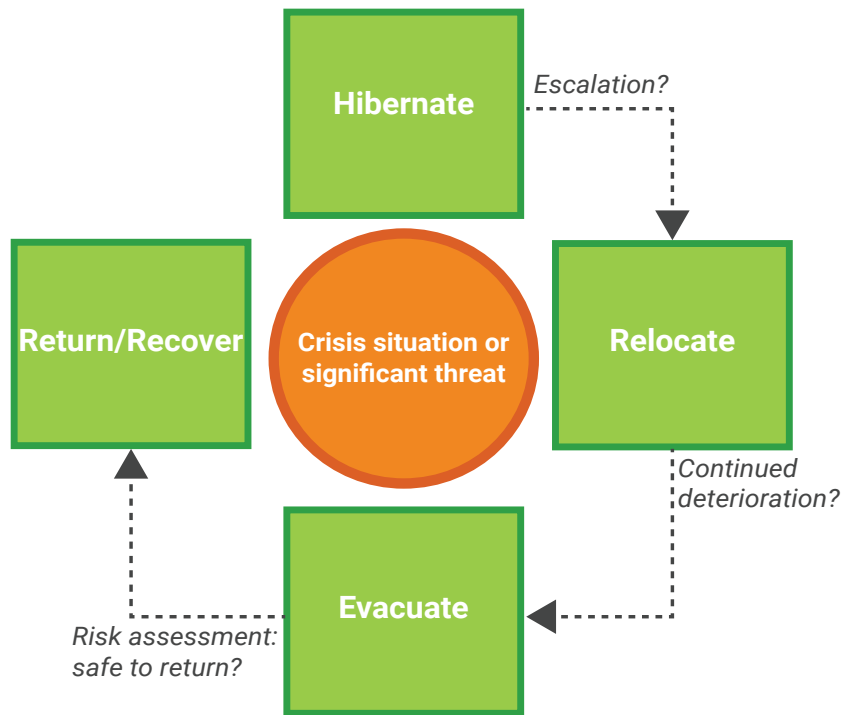
Evacuation

Operations are suspended in a country, international staff are evacuated to another state, and national staff are moved from deployed areas to their home areas. Depending on the situation, some limited programming may continue using remote management.

Responding to Significant Threats

Follow these action steps when responding to a crisis situation or significant threat.

Hibernate — *Escalation?* → **Relocate** — *Continued deterioration?* → **Evacuate** — *Risk assessment: safe to return?* → **Return/Recover**

Center: **Crisis situation or significant threat**

Hibernate. Stop operations, stay, and wait to see if conditions improve.

Relocate. Move staff, assets, and offices to a safer location in-country.

Evacuate. Move international staff out of the country. Facilitate national staff safety. Secure assets.

Return/Recover. Evaluate when it is safe for staff to return and restart activities.

Identifying Triggers

It is important for staff both in-country and at headquarters to identify 'triggers' and determine when contingency plans should be activated in specific contexts.

For example:

- If rainfall reaches a historic level that normally results in flooding ➔ Activate hibernation or relocation contingency plans.

- If an armed conflict in another part of the country expands to an agreed upon line or area ➔ Activate relocation contingencies.

Relocation?

Evacuation?
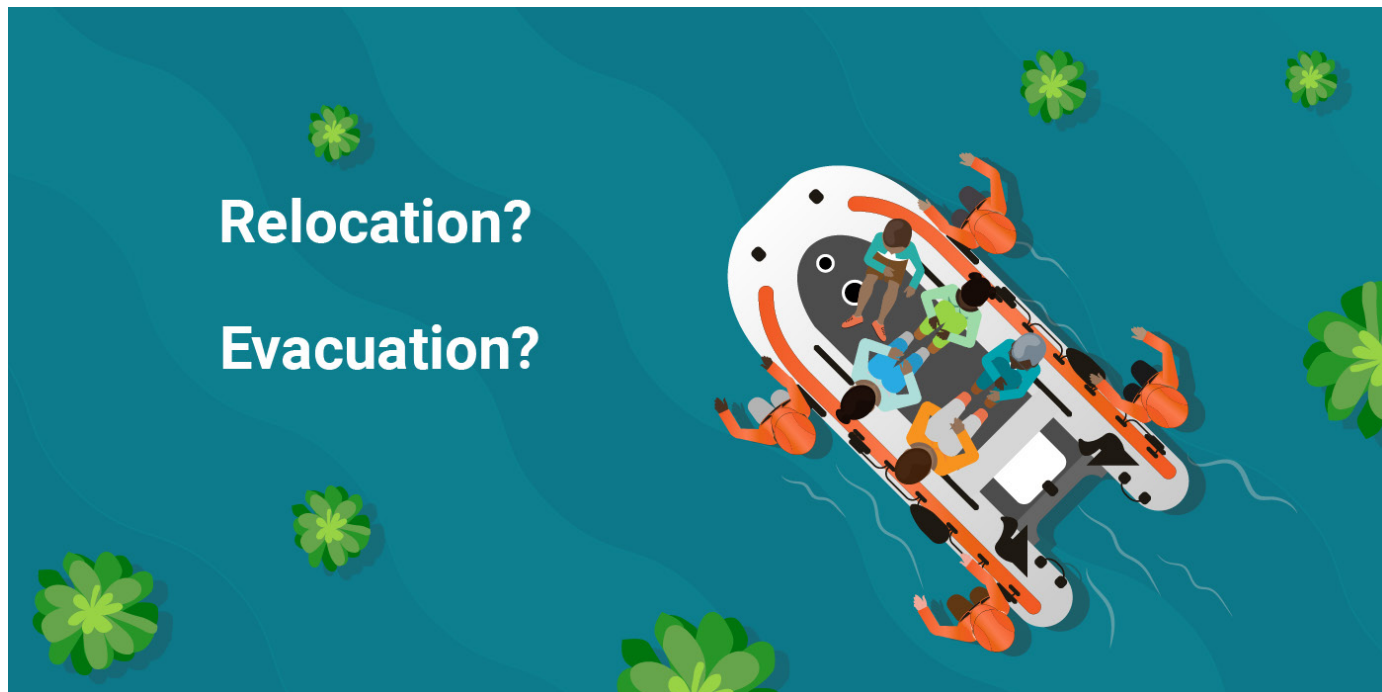
Agree on triggers in advance so all in-country staff, host government, headquarters, and donors will understand your decision and action plans.

Do not share triggers or resultant actions with particular actors. For example, it might not be appropriate to share information about relocation activities with actors in conflict zones in case it affects their decisions or increases your vulnerability as a target.

Determine triggers when the situation is calm. If decisions are made during the height of a crisis, people's perception of risk may affect the decision-making process.

Understand how the relocation and evacuation of staff may be phased, with different triggers applicable for different staff.

For example, in an area subject to flooding the triggers might be:
- Heavy rain for six days with possible flooding ➔ No essential staff relocated
- Heavy rain for eight days and rivers reaching an agreed level ➔ All staff relocated

Determine the criteria and requirements for the relocation and evacuation of essential staff based on your organization, the context, and the specific security risks. Consider each staff member's:

- Role
- Program experience
- Personal risk appetite
- Specific vulnerabilities related to ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, disability, and/or nationality

Ensure all individuals are aware of your organization's policies in contexts where relocation and/or evacuation may be required.

Establish a 'free to go' policy where individuals have the right to relocate or evacuate if their personal sense of risk is exceeded.

Three Phases of Contingency Planning

While no two crises are alike, there usually is some warning indicating that the situation is deteriorating, or a natural disaster is imminent. Some natural disasters occur without warning such as earthquakes, while other humanitarian crisis situations such as tropical storms, flooding, or conflict offer some warning or indicators. Regardless of the type of crisis, your organization should have a contingency plan addressing three key phases.

Warning Phase

Alerts all stakeholders that it is time to prepare.

Activation Phase

Sets the contingency plan into motion.

Recovery Phase

Details how the organization will return to operations safely.

Hibernation

Hibernation Checklist

Follow these guidelines when hibernating staff in response to anticipated security threats.

Ensure offices have stockpiled emergency food, water, and first aid supplies for the anticipated number of people and agreed period of time.

Choose appropriate stockpiled supplies that are non-perishable, portable, and not frozen (in case the generator breaks down).

Store stockpiled supplies in a safe place to reduce risk of damage or theft. However, they should be easily accessible for staff to retrieve the supplies in an emergency.

Have appropriate communication equipment at the hibernation location. For example, if you are moving into an enclosed safe room, a satellite phone will not work.

Have a back-up generator and fuel (if applicable).

Pay staff two to three weeks' salary in cash to allow them to survive.

Contact suppliers and banks and advise them of your plans.

Have staff members work from home but check in daily and advise on their situation.

During chaotic situations, minimize activity in the office, back up important files off site, and disable vehicles if there is a threat of theft.

Liaise with other NGOs in similar situations.

Maintain contact with communities to gather information and let them know they are not forgotten.

Relocation

Relocation Checklist

Follow these guidelines when relocating staff in response to anticipated security threats.

Identify in advance the locations to which your staff can temporarily relocate if the working environment or region becomes unsafe. These may include existing field offices, other NGO compounds, guest houses, or other secure locations.

Ensure that the temporary location has suitable phone and internet access.

Maintain good communication with communities so that they do not feel abandoned. This will also enhance your acceptance strategy.

Update evacuation contingency plans of relocated staff members in case the situation deteriorates further.

Encourage staff members to inform their embassy, consulate, and/or insurance company of their relocation.

Ensure your relocation plan for national staff also involves moving their families to a safer location.

Evacuation

Evacuation Checklist

Follow these guidelines when evacuating staff in response to anticipated security threats.

- Do not focus entirely on international staff. National staff hired in one area and employed in another (re-located staff) are often at far more risk than international staff.

- Ensure that national staff are internally evacuated to their home areas before pulling out of operations.

- Do not promise to evacuate national staff. It is not the role of NGOs to create refugees nor is it legal to employ staff in a third country.

- Pay staff one month's salary in cash prior to evacuation.

- Establish communication channels with remaining national staff and communities to assist in determining when it is safe to return.

- Plan how assets such as vehicles and computer equipment will be secured in-country or the legalities of moving them to a neighboring state.

- Do not rely on the United Nations to evacuate your international staff. Make your own arrangements.

- Do not rely on promises from embassies to evacuate all your staff, especially if international staff members are not citizens of that country.

- If you have insurance, have clear details of what it specifically covers. For example, it may require using a particular standard of airport runway that is not available at your location.

- Once staff have been evacuated, it can be very difficult to return to the same location. When developing the contingency plan for evacuation, consider indicators for return, as well as how to maintain relationships previously developed with different stakeholders. Evacuations should always be considered as a last resort measure.