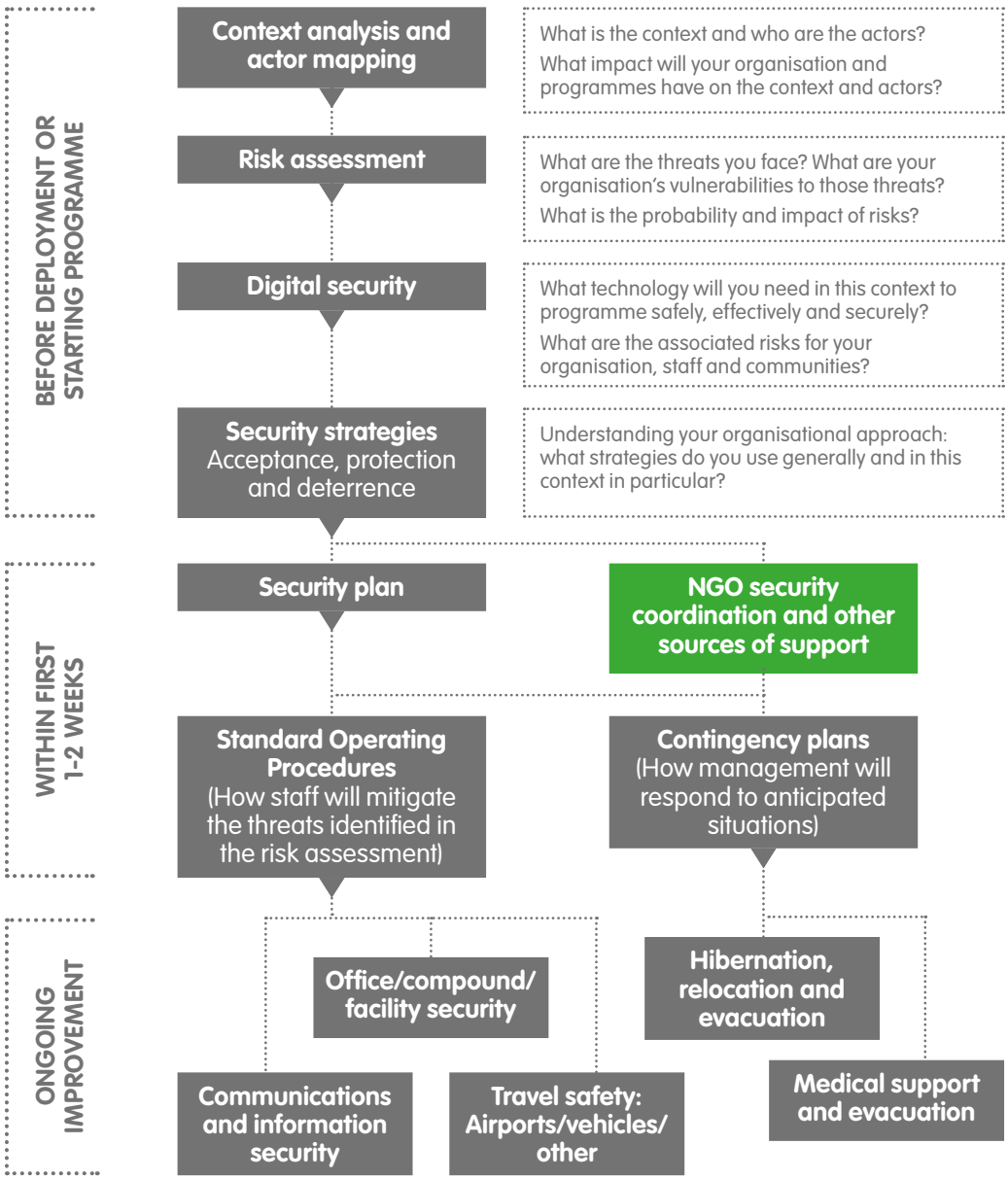
6 NGO security coordination and other sources of support



In any country where aid organisations congregate in response to an emergency or ongoing crisis, various forums and coordination groups often develop. In regions where insecurity is an issue, NGO security-dedicated forums may also form. These may be part of a broader NGO coordination body, a stand-alone body or an informal group for information sharing and coordination.

Security forums are usually chaired by one organisation and attended by security focal points of the member organisations. These forums generally share context assessments and reports on incidents. They may also share the costs of organising training for staff, advise on recommendations from embassies or host governments, and can act as a central coordination point with other actors such as UNDSS. If a forum is available it is strongly advised that organisations join, both to gather context information and to identify best practices for that particular country.

Membership of a security forum is not a substitute for an organisation completing its own risk assessment and developing working relationships with key actors such as UNDSS or other agencies.

When appointing a staff member to attend these coordination meetings, ensure they are supported in dedicating time to this as a priority as well as being fully briefed on the rules for participation – in particular, how the information shared is to be managed. Ensure they are supported in sharing outputs within the organisation to maximise the benefit of the membership to the coordinating body.

There are a number of sources of additional information that organisations can link into to improve the flow of information on incidents, find advice on how to mitigate risks from various threats and improve security capacity. For instance, 'Saving Lives Together' (SLT), is a framework for security collaboration between NGOs and the United Nations. It comprises a set of recommendations such as sharing information and resources, based on best practices in security risk management. While the United Nations does not take responsibility for evacuation, communications, and other support services, they may coordinate such services in certain contexts.

The latest version of the SLT framework was released in 2015 and is accompanied by guidelines on expectations regarding the NGO-UN collaboration. SLT is not the exclusive domain of UNDSS, but the latter is the lead agency within the United Nations system. Local contacts for UNDSS can be identified through HQ members of the SLT – such as EISF or InterAction.

Other sources of safety and security information are:

- National governments, including donor governments and their embassies.
- Host government departments.
- The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) which produces security material for aid organisations in some contexts.
- Insurance providers, as they will often have a threat advisory service linked to various countries and/or regions.
- NGO security consultants.
- Local commercial security providers (guard companies).
- International and national media.
- Other NGOs and their partner organisations.
- Host and beneficiary communities.
- National staff.
- Insecurity Insight.
- Aid Worker Security Database.
- International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) if available.
- European Interagency Security Forum (EISF).

Making good decisions requires reliable and accurate information. All information must be considered against the reliability of the source, the number of separate individuals/organisations reporting the same information, and any local bias. Generally, avoid acting on rumours without confirmation by a reliable source.

▶ *See Module 9 – Communications and information security*

In an emergency or crisis situation, the safety of staff, your organisation and possibly also beneficiary communities will depend on your ability to take decisions and activate contingency plans. There are a number of systems for rating the quality of information. Below is a simple grid to help in assessing information received.

	Detailed and credible information	Vague or incomplete information
Trusted, reliable source	**Good information for decision-making**	**Consider information and seek confirmation**
Unknown or unreliable source	**Seek confirmation from known source**	**Do not disregard but do not make decisions without another source**