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# Crisis management



The death, arrest or abduction of a staff member is hugely challenging for any organisation. Not only must the organisation respond to the incident, manage relations with the authorities, and provide support to family and colleagues, but the organisation must still continue to manage its activities and staff in other locations.

The successful resolution and management of any crisis situation depends on your organisation's ability to take appropriate decisions quickly, which requires preparation, a good flow of information, and clear channels of communication that all staff understand.



**Preparation is vital for the successful management of any incident, especially where a coordinated, effective response involving different locations and stakeholders is required.**

## Establishing a crisis management structure

The majority of security incidents will be handled through your organisation's regular line management. However, exceptional situations can arise which, due to the nature and severity of the incident, or its wider implications, would require your organisation to establish a dedicated structure to respond. This is generally referred to as a 'crisis'.

An essential part of pre-planning for such events is to identify a team that will coordinate and manage the organisation's response. A key component of this is the headquarters or regional-based Crisis Management Team (CMT), although the terminology and composition used by different organisations, and their responsibilities, vary significantly. In many cases, the team responsible will consist of key members of an organisation's senior management team. However, roles within the CMT should be determined by the experience, capacity and skills that individuals bring to the team, rather than be solely based on the position that they hold.



**It is easier to stand down a CMT when it becomes apparent that the incident is not as serious as anticipated than it is to activate one after the incident has progressed.**

You will need to develop a crisis management team and overall structure that suits your organisation. However, good practice based on experience normally includes a small CMT based at headquarters and an incident management team (IMT) based as close to where the incident occurred (or is occurring) as it is safe to be. The strategic decision making authority (DMA) is at the most senior level and external to the CMT. Essential support staff, such as family support staff, a media spokesperson and logistics personnel should be considered as part of the crisis management response structure but are not part of the CMT. It is good practice to identify potential alternative individuals for each of the core roles in order to ensure adequate cover during a prolonged incident response, or where a member is sick, on leave or travelling. However, as a smaller NGO you may find this challenging and therefore you will need to identify a suitable team bearing in mind the capacity, skills and experience you have available.

## Crisis Management Team (CMT)

This is a small team dedicated to managing all aspects of an incident or situation and liaising with all the stakeholders involved.

The CMT composition and responsibilities vary depending on the type of incident/situation, its location, and the level of support required.

### Core CMT functions

<b>Crisis Coordinator</b>	Overall coordination and management of CMT and primary decision-making authority within the team. The Crisis Coordinator normally reports to the Executive Director/CEO with whom executive decision-making sits.
<b>Human Resources</b>	Advises on HR policy and coordinates all personnel, family support, and insurance aspects of the critical incident response.
<b>Programmes and Operations</b>	Advises on country context, programme activities, and relevant in-country stakeholders, and coordinates all communication with the country team.
<b>Communications and Media</b>	Advises on media issues and coordinates all media activity and all internal communications.
<b>Information Management and Support</b>	Supports the CMT and maintains information records during the response.

Multiple functions may be carried out by one CMT member. Depending on the nature of the incident, and capacity within the organisation, additional support roles will be required, including security, finance, insurance, legal advice, social media, internal communications, and IT.

The IMT will have similar internal functions as those that are within the CMT, although the focus will be on a more localised management of the incident. Clearly defined and managed communication between the CMT and IMT is essential for the successful response to any crisis. For countries where the NGO has no staff based permanently in the country where the incident occurred, arrangements for how to provide the localised response will need to be included in the crisis management plan.

## When is it a crisis?

The point at which an incident or situation becomes critical or a crisis depends primarily on its severity but is also influenced by your organisation's capacity, level of pre-planning and experience in dealing with such incidents.

For some NGOs, less severe incidents or situations may still be considered critical due to the limited capacity, experience and resources the organisation can draw upon to respond. It is usually identified as a 'crisis' when normal management structures are no longer deemed sufficient to cope with the incident, hence initiating the crisis management response.

Any security incident or situation affecting your staff and programmes must be quickly assessed at a senior level to determine its potential impact and to clarify the level of engagement and support required to manage the situation. You should clearly identify what triggers your crisis management mechanism and who in the organisation makes this call. Examples of critical incidents which are likely to activate your crisis management team include but are not limited to:

- Death or serious injury of a staff member;
- Death or serious injury of a third party as a result of actions by staff or the organisation's activities;
- Serious security deterioration or a specific threat that directly affects the security of staff;
- Mass-casualty incident (for example, natural disasters, bombings or attacks) affecting staff;
- Physical assault or sexual violence against a staff member;
- Abduction, kidnapping, arrest or detention involving staff;
- Any security incident likely to result in damaging representation in the media.

### Crisis management principles

When responding to any critical incident involving staff, the following key principles must apply:

- Minimise further harm and ensure the security and well-being of the victim(s) and other staff affected by the incident.
- Assure families and other staff members that the organisation is responding appropriately, and provide support to affected family members.
- Minimise possible loss or damage to property and resources; reduce any negative impact on the organisation's reputation and the continuity of existing programmes/activities, so long as this does not put at risk the security and well-being of staff.
- Maintain effective communications with all internal and external stakeholders to enable their cooperation, bearing in mind the need for confidentiality.

## Crisis management plans

Every incident is unique and therefore difficult to prepare for fully, but there are essential mechanisms and arrangements that can be planned in advance.

Although a crisis management plan is a headquarters-level document that assists senior management in mobilising and focusing resources in response to critical incidents or crisis situations involving staff, there must also be a country-level component for the local IMT. Clearly defining roles and responsibilities, and developing key action points, checklists and tools as part of a crisis management plan, will enable your staff to respond more quickly and appropriately. Keeping a record of decisions and actions should start as soon as the crisis response mechanism is activated.



**Staff will be under significant stress when responding to a crisis, so crisis management plans should be simple to use with easy-to-access checklists.**

### Crisis management plans

Key components of a basic crisis management plan should include:

- **Introduction** – outline who the document is for, who is covered by the plan, key definitions used, and when and by whom the document should be reviewed.
- **Activation and triggers** – specify how the organisation’s crisis response mechanism is activated and closed down, who makes the decision and what criteria are used.
- **Management and decision-making** – outline the structure for managing critical incidents, the key stakeholders involved, the organisation’s crisis management principles and confidentiality issues. Include a decision flow chart to explain communication and decision-making.
- **Roles and responsibilities** – outline the specific roles and responsibilities for the different functions within the crisis response structure, including the CMT, IMT and support staff. Terms of reference documents (ToRs) should specify each role’s responsibilities before, during and after the incident.
- **Incident protocols** – include procedures and guidance on the possible immediate actions, stakeholder management issues and post-incident support needs that relate to specific incident scenarios, for example, medical emergencies, sexual violence, natural disasters, security evacuations, abductions and kidnapping incidents, and staff death.
- **Resources and tools** – include checklists, formats and tools to support the organisation’s response, including templates to log communications and decisions, key contact lists, etc.

## Assistance providers and support

Specialist external assistance providers can play a vital role in supporting your organisation during a crisis by ensuring access to specialised knowledge and advice when it is most needed. In some cases, depending on the nationality of the individuals involved, specialist support may also be provided by the home government.

Even larger organisations, with in-house security teams and extensive security capacity, make use of external assistance providers during crisis situations. For smaller NGOs, which may lack the experience in dealing with these types of incidents or the capacity to cover the various CMT roles, establishing access to external assistance in advance of an incident can be a major factor in enhancing the organisation's crisis response capacity.

Organisations can access comprehensive emergency assistance and crisis management support services from commercial providers and consultants through their insurance or by engaging companies and individuals directly. It is important to ensure that any experts used are appropriate for the organisation and have the level of knowledge required. There are a broad range of services available, including medical assistance and medical evacuation support, evacuation of staff due to a deteriorating security situation or natural disaster, access to abduction and kidnap response consultants, and crisis management support and training. When considering additional support, you should be clear on the type of support services that are included through your existing insurance and which response companies provide these services.

Your organisation cannot delegate the management of critical incidents or relinquish its decision-making responsibility to an external assistance provider or other stakeholders. Your organisation must remain actively engaged and is responsible for ensuring that all responses and actions are appropriate. Any external support mechanisms should complement your organisation's own response to a critical incident.



**Countries may help to repatriate their nationals in case of an evacuation caused by a security incident (for example, a coup d'état), however, this will be dependent on the country, both host and home, and should not be assumed.**

**The UN also does not guarantee to evacuate aid workers who are not UN employees. Even if they do carry out an evacuation they are likely to charge the full cost for their assistance.**



## Further information

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*Crisis Management Plan Example*

*EISF guide 'Managing the message: Communication and media management in a security crisis'*

*EISF guide 'Family First: Liaison and support during a crisis'*

*EISF briefing paper 'Crisis Management of Critical Incidents'*

*EISF briefing paper 'Engaging Private Security Providers: A Guideline for Non-Governmental Organisations'*