

Summary Brief - NGO Security Risk Management Practices: a case study investigating the influence of GISF's activities in Northern Iraq, 2012-2022

The Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) is an NGO-led peer network of over 140 international NGO members. GISF supports NGOs in creating safe humanitarian operations and access for crisis-affected communities by providing original research, events, and a platform for security managers to share their experiences, knowledge, and best practice on humanitarian security risk management (SRM).

Historically, GISF has struggled to understand the influence of its activities on decision-making and SRM practices at the operational level. To better understand how GISF's activities have contributed to improved information sharing, strengthened SRM practices, and enhanced SRM knowledge and skills, GISF conducted a case study in January 2022, looking at the influence of GISF's activities on the development of SRM practices and knowledge in Northern Iraq between 2012 and 2022. GISF is still testing how to best measure outcomes of its activities and its impact, and this case study investigating the effects of GISF's activities by looking at the development of SRM practices in a particular context represents the first attempt at conducting such an evaluative research exercise.

The study identified some positive influence in improved information sharing, strengthened SRM practices, and enhanced SRM skills and knowledge in Northern Iraq. In several cases, GISF resources were directly linked to developing good SRM practices in relation to mainstreaming security, crisis management, and partnerships. Nonetheless, there were still several areas, such as inclusive security or security strategies, where SRM practices should be strengthened to protect humanitarian staff in Northern Iraq and facilitate greater access.

The research also suggested that GISF activities and resources predominantly shape SRM approaches at the global level, though most country-level security staff were unaware of their origins. The study highlighted a lack of awareness of GISF and its work among security staff in Northern Iraq, and that global security advisors rarely shared GISF resources and activities with security staff in country.

While some of these findings are aligned with GISF's goals as a member-led NGO network supporting global NGO security staff, the drive towards local action and the vulnerability of national colleagues and partners indicate that GISF should look to improve dissemination with security staff at the operational level to ensure its resources and activities have their desired positive impact on SRM.



Methodology and Approach

Building on GISF's theory of change, log frame, and guidance for h2h network members on evaluating and measuring impact, GISF aimed to investigate positive outcomes linked to GISF's activities and resources in a particular context. These outcomes are defined as 'likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs' (OECD/DAC).

Three evidence and learning questions (ELQs) were developed to determine how organisations' security approaches and practices have evolved linked to GISF's activities and resources:

- How does GISF's convening work facilitate information sharing and bring together SRM actors to improve operational decision-making in Northern Iraq?
- How are GISF's SRM resources and activities contributing to strengthened SRM practices in Northern Iraq?
- How are GISF's resources and activities contributing to enhanced SRM skills and knowledge within Northern Iraq?

This report draws together findings from a desk study of GISF documents, an online survey and key informant interviews. In total, 22 interviews were conducted with key informants from GISF member organisations, local and national NGOs and INSO. However, while these findings provide important insights into the positive outcomes of GISFs' activities in Northern Iraq, the limited availability of interviewees due to Covid-19 spikes at the time of the research, NGO staff turnover, GISF documentation systems and staff turnover present a limitation of the findings of this research.

1

ELQ1: How does GISF's convening work facilitate information sharing and bring together SRM actors to improve operational decision-making in Northern Iraq?

In Northern Iraq, most NGO security staff interviewed cited personal relationships, social media, security networks, and NGO security staff Skype, WhatsApp, and Telegram groups as their sources of information. A few interviewees reported that contextual information was shared from the global level, more commonly by regional staff. Direct evidence of GISF's influence in this regard was limited.

Figure 1: ELQ 1

GISF activities and resources

- Syria and Iraq teleconferences for NGOs
- Mosul e-mail sharing group
- Syria and Iraq forum sessions



Possible outcomes

- NGOs share alerts and context-related information in NGO security groups
- Information from security groups at the global and regional levels is shared within NGOs
- NGOs value the importance of sharing information and incidents

GISF provided a platform which improved NGO global security advisors' understanding of the context and other organisations' security processes and concerns. In this sense, GISF contributed to improved operational decision-making in Iraq overall and aligning the operational, regional, and global levels within organisations.



ELQ2: How are GISF's SRM resources and activities contributing to strengthened SRM practices in Northern Iraq?

The second evidence and learning question assessed possible outcomes around the contribution of key themes of GISF's resources and activities towards strengthened NGO SRM practices in Northern Iraq. Looking at these themes and the SRM practices GISF's activities advocated for, the case study examined SRM practices in Northern Iraq in relation to them, investigating whether positive outcomes of GISF's work could be identified.

a) Mainstreaming security

Security to Go: people management guide

Blogs and articles (e.g., programme and

security relations/duty to be caring)

Aidex and HNPW 2021 workshops

Webinars (e.g., good security risk

Overall, staff working in security and programmes in Northern Iraq appear to have a strong relationship. Security staff actively engaged with programme staff, were involved in new programme areas and activities, and programme staff were involved in risk assessments and security decisions.

Figure 2: ELQ 2a

management)

Security culture workshops SRM: basic guide for smaller NGOs Forum sessions (e.g., future of security risk management, risk management culture) Security is expand pr



Possible outcomes

- Security is embedded in programme planning and operational processes
- Security is part of decisions to establish or expand programming in new areas
- A diverse group of staff are involved in security risk assessments

Such positive relationships between programmes and security were also strengthened by the focus given to both access and security in Iraq. Although GISF was not directly identified as a source of the positive practices - in most cases, structures and approaches were encouraged by the organisations' HQ - GISF's emphasis on the topic and engagement with HQ staff could have positively influenced the strengthening of relationships between security and programmes globally.

b) Security strategies

All NGOs indicated that acceptance and relationship building are central to their Northern Iraq security strategy. Most NGOs informally monitored acceptance of their organisation's activities through various feedback mechanisms and programme monitoring and evaluation tools. However, none conducted any formal acceptance analysis. Very few of the NGOs in Northern Iraq used private security providers (PSPs) for their guarding services, but those that did had clear policies on the selection and use of PSPs. One organisation's approach to using PSPs was directly influenced by GISF and ICoCA's work.

Figure 3: ELQ 2b

GISF activities and resources

- Security strategies guidance is included in papers and guides (e.g., Security to Go)
- Forum sessions (e.g., today's acceptance, acceptance in network age, working with PSPs)
- Achieving safe operations through acceptance paper
- Webinars (e.g., Acceptance past, present, and future, private security contracting with ICoCA)
- Articles and blogs (e.g., disinformation and SRM, community acceptance, NGO responsibilities for PSPs)

Possible outcomes

- NGOs use an active acceptance-based approach Leads to
 - NGOs conduct regular assessments and monitoring of acceptance levels
 - NGOs have a clear visibility strategy
 - NGOs appropriately use deterrence strategies
 - NGOs have policies and guidance on the use of PSPs

c) Resourcing SRM

Most of the NGO security staff interviewed had a dedicated security budget. However, the two national NGOs interviewed still faced issues in funding security and safety structures. While GISF was not mentioned by name, GISF's ongoing activities and conversations with donors and INGOs have likely helped organisations secure dedicated budgets for security and safety expenditures. This strategic input would have had to come from the global level. With less international attention on Iraq, security and safety teams may face more funding challenges in the future.

Figure 4: ELQ 2c

GISF activities and resources

- The Cost of SRM paper
- #AtWhatCost campaign
- Resourcing SRM theme included in publications (e.g., Security to Go and the Partnership and SRM joint action guides)



Possible outcomes

- NGOs include safety and security as a direct
- Donors provide adequate funding for security

d) Security collaboration and information sharing

All the SRM professionals interviewed were actively part of different Skype, Telegram, and WhatsApp groups for NGO security managers that were used for information gathering purposes.

However, concerns around the trustworthiness of bigger groups meant that most interviewees stated that they were reluctant to share incidents in these groups. NGOs' active participation in GISF's Mosul sharing group, Mattermost Iraq channel and



teleconference discussions meant that GISF provided alternative routes for global NGO security staff to share information with other organisations despite these trust issues, indicating GISF's contribution towards information sharing and collaboration in Northern Iraq.

Figure 5: ELQ 2d

GISF activities and resources

- Security collaboration guidance is included in resources (e.g., Security to Go, SRM: a basic guide for smaller NGOs)
- Security collaboration encouraged throughout GISF forums and events
- Information and best practice resources shared on the GISF website

Leads to

Possible outcomes

- Security staff actively participate in different security platforms, networks and online
- Security staff share information, alerts, incidents, and best practices with other organisations

e) Critical incident management

Most NGOs interviewed had country-level Crisis Management Teams/Incident Management Teams and specific plans to manage critical incidents affecting their staff. Some NGOs had established incident management structures within their field offices. Amongst L/NNGOs, however, the level of crisis management provision was significantly reduced, although one expressed that they could draw on support from their international partners. With many positive examples amongst organisations whose global security staff are active GISF members and have participated in many GISF crisis management events, it can be assumed that

Figure 6: ELQ 2e

GISF activities and resources

- Crisis management paper
- Family support guide
- Crisis communication guide
- Family liaison/media management workshops
- Regional crisis management workshops (Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan)



Possible outcomes

- NGOs have clear structures, roles, and responsibilities for managing critical incidents
- NGOs have detailed crisis/incident management plans
- NGOs have appropriate family support mechanisms
- NGOs conduct regular crisis simulations and training

GISF's work on critical incident management has influenced the structures and plans adopted by these NGOs. However, only a few direct linkages between GISF outputs and good practice examples could be identified.

f) Abduction and kidnapping

Figure 7: ELQ 2f

Possible outcomes GISF activities and resources NGOs have specific abduction management Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management protocols auide Leads to NGOs provide abduction and kidnap Abduction management workshops (e.g., FCO, HCNU) training to staff Forum sessions (e.g., member case studies, abduction management) Blogs and articles (e.g., jihadist threat, hostage taking and the media)

Several NGOs indicated that they have specific protocols and plans to manage abduction incidents. However, the high turnover of staff within organisations could pose the risk of a loss of knowledge and capacity gained from such experiences. Although most security staff were unfamiliar with GISF resources, of those that were, the GISF Abduction and Kidnap Management guide was mentioned as a key resource used to develop the organisation's response measures and training materials.

g) Sexual violence

Many NGOs identify sexual violence as a risk and several NGOs indicated that they have policies and procedures established to manage sexual violence risk. However, most approaches focused on female staff adjusting their behaviour.

Figure 8: ELQ 2q

Podcasts (e.g., sexual violence)

Possible outcomes GISF activities and resources NGOs implement survivor-orientated sexual Managing sexual violence against aid workers guide violence protocols/approach Leads to NGOs have trained focal points Managing sexual violence workshops NGOs have appropriate support Forum sessions (e.g., member case studies, managing sexual violence) mechanisms and post-incident aftercare Blogs and articles (e.g., sexual violence Sexual violence training is provided to staff against aid workers)

In many cases, sexual violence was not perceived as a security issue. A few NGOs had comprehensive measures in place with trained focal points. One organisation confirmed that GISF's Managing Sexual Violence guide helped the NGO develop its response measures.



h) Inclusive security

Figure 9: ELQ 2h

GISF activities and resources · Gender and Security: guidelines for mainstreaming gender in security risk management paper Managing the Diverse Profiles of Staff paper Managing the Diverse Profiles of Staff workshops

- Organisational Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Humanitarian Workers training
- HNPW 2021- two sessions on a personcentred approach to SRM
- Women Security Awareness Training
- Inclusive security podcast series

Possible outcomes

- NGO security staff and NGOs are aware of the different risks staff face based on their personal profile
- Risk assessments reflect risks associated with staff's personal characteristics
- Risk assessments involve different groups of
- Guidance is issued to different groups of staff
- Training for different groups of staff is offered
- Policies and procedures to promote women in security roles are present

SRM practices around inclusive security in Iraq varied. Most NGOs issued safety

Leads to

i) Partnerships and SRM

More than two-thirds of the organisations interviewed demonstrated awareness of the need to address security risks in their partnerships. Several INGOs stated that security was included as part of partner capacity assessments. Three organisations confirmed that GISF's joint action guide had directly influenced their partner security assessments. However, budgeting for security in partnerships still

and security guidance for female staff, but risks for LGBTQ+ staff were not accounted for as cultural sensitives were an obstacle to open discussions around risks for LGBTQ+ staff. Despite awareness of the risks linked to gender and ethnicity, these rarely seemed to be formally included in risk assessment processes. While GISF has had some positive influence in encouraging these conversations and, in one case, was directly identified as the source for improved practices, more work needs to be done on formalising the inclusion of personal profiles in risk assessments.

Figure 10: ELQ 2i

GISF activities and resources

- Security Management and Capacity **Development: International agencies** working with local partners paper
- Presentation of partners paper to MENA regional forum
- Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective paper
- Partnerships and SRM: a joint action guide for international and national NGOs in partnerships
- Partnerships in Crises podcast
- Eight regional workshops about the partnerships guide
- Blogs and articles about SRM in partnerships (e.g., sharing risks in partnerships)
- HNPW session on partnerships



 Security teams are brought into discussions with partner organisations

Possible outcomes

- Security support is offered to partner organisations in the form of training, resources and information being shared
- The responsibility of both organisations concerning security is reflected in contracts and MoUs

presented an obstacle for the INGOs and the L/NNGOs interviewed. One INGO global security advisor confirmed that additional GISF resources such as the NGO guide for smaller NGOs had been shared with partner NGOs.

i) Security training

Figure 11: ELQ2j

GISF activities and resources

- NGO security training paper
- NGO security training project
- Forum sessions (e.g., HEAT good practice, security training technology, building capacity: local partners and national staff)
- Approved training providers and trainings listed on the GISF website
- GISF/Disaster Ready online resources
- Virtual trainers ToT
- Blogs and articles (e.g., sharp end of risk, simulated learning)
- Training for security in today's world workshop



Possible outcomes

- NGOs provide regular simulation-based personal security training to all staff
- Staff with management responsibilities are provided security management training
- NGOs provide role-specific security training to drivers, guards etc.
- NGOs offer additional context-related training for negotiation, ERW etc.
- Staff have access to online security training

organisations required their international staff to complete Hostile Environment and Awareness Training (HEAT)-type courses gisf before deployment to Iraq, and several NGOs also provided simulation-based/HEAT-type courses to their national staff.

The provision of security training within L/NNGOs was more limited, although some L/NNGO staff accessed security training via their international partners. Most trainings were based on internal training packages developed internally by NGOs at the global level or via external providers. Although no direct links were identified to GISF resources, several of those interviewed felt that GISF resources could have been used to develop their organisation's security training.

ELQ3: How are GISF's resources and activities contributing to enhanced SRM skills and knowledge within Northern Iraq?

This ELQ assesses how NGO security staff in Northern Iraq have accessed and engaged with GISF resources and activities and how this engagement enhanced SRM skills and knowledge.

Overall, there was minimal awareness of GISF amongst security staff in Northern Iraq. Those familiar with GISF knew it from previous HQ-based roles or from internet searches. Few interviewees could recall global or regional security teams disseminating GISF resources or events. In several cases, interviewees were unaware that their organisations were members of GISF.

Figure 12: ELQ3

GISF activities and resources

- Practical guides and tools
- Regional workshops
- Webinars and roundtables
- Newsletters, blogs, and articles
- GISF podcast series
- GISF/Disaster Ready online resources
- SRM videos
- NGO Security Toolbox



Possible outcomes

- Security staff access and utilise GISF resources
- Security staff participate in GISF events
- Security staff visit the GISF website and resource library
- Security staff receive GISF newsletters, blogs, and articles

Although unsubstantiated, some interviewees perceived global security staff to act as gatekeepers and filter events or resources from global mechanisms such as

Overall, security training provision in Iraq was to a high standard. Nearly all

GISF. Although there was a common perception that GISF resources have likely influenced the documents developed at the global level, this would require further interviews with HQ staff to confirm.

sharing of GISF information and resources challenges GISF's assumption that members share GISF resources internally.



Conclusion

Overall, this study suggests a varying degree of influence of GISF's activities and resources on SRM practices in Northern Iraq and limited awareness of GISF among NGO security staff. This study identified many good SRM practices that echoed practices GISF has advocated for. However, linking positive examples confidently to specific GISF activities and resources was challenging. Furthermore, additional obstacles were created by the way GISF tracks and monitors its engagement and communication with country-level security staff, the systems for which were not established during its earlier years. The lack of awareness of GISF amongst security staff within Northern Iraq and the limited

The way NGOs prepare and disseminate resources internally makes it difficult to determine their connection to GISF resources. GISF's activities and resources have principally been aimed at members' global security staff and more recently, this has been expanded to include regional security staff. However, in line with GISF's mission to have a positive impact on humanitarian SRM to keep aid workers safe and achieve sustainable access for populations in need, and the sector's push towards more local action, it has increasingly produced resources and events useful for NGO staff on the frontlines. The following recommendations aim at enhancing GISF's positive impact on humanitarian SRM and its ability to better understand its impact in the future.

Improving GISF's engagement with staff at the operational level

The drive towards more local action underlines the need to reconsider how GISF disseminates information at the operational level. To ensure that its resources reach the operational level, GISF should:

- Recognise security staff at the country level as a specific audience and tailor resources and communications to appeal to this group.
- Identify operational-level 'ambassadors' who can promote the benefits of engagement with GISF and its resources.
- lacktriangleright Encourage members to promote their GISF membership and GISF activities and resources more broadly within their organisations.
- Actively introduce and promote GISF, its activities and resources within different security networks at the national and regional level regularly at events and meetings.

Improving how GISF captures and measures the outcomes of its activities

To improve how GISF captures and measures the outcomes of its activities, GISF should:

- Formalise the documentation of its activities, identify intended outcomes of research projects and events, and measure them regularly.
- Capture feedback from members and other stakeholders on the influence of GISF activities and resources within their organisations, identifying specific examples of how resources or events resulted in changes in practice.
- Develop its theory of change and define the intended outcomes of its activities to formalise a framework to measure GISF's influence.
 - Conduct a multi-level organisational case study to enhance its understanding of how organisations utilise GISF activities, resources, and information.