



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 GISF's 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.



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 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

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

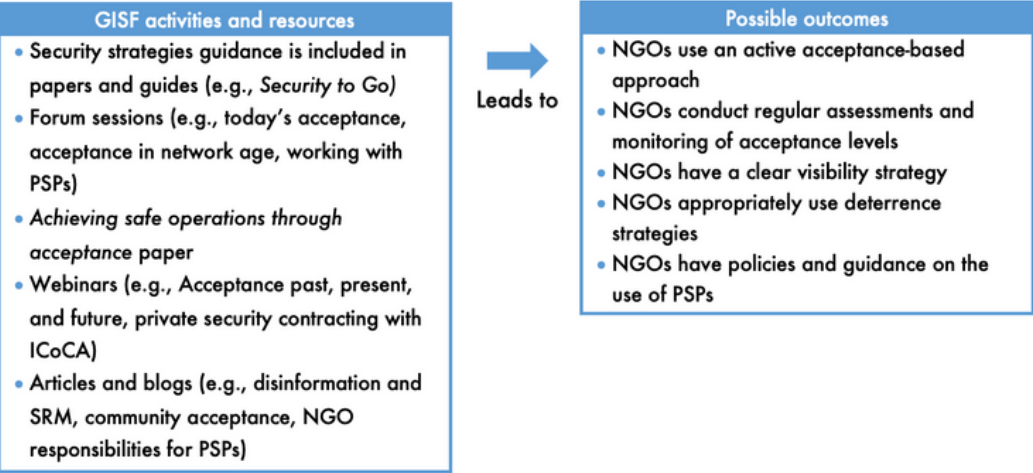


Such positive relationships between programmes and security were also strengthened by the focus given to both access and security in Iraq. Although GISF was not directly identified as a source of the positive practices - in most cases, structures and approaches were encouraged by the organisations' HQ - 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.

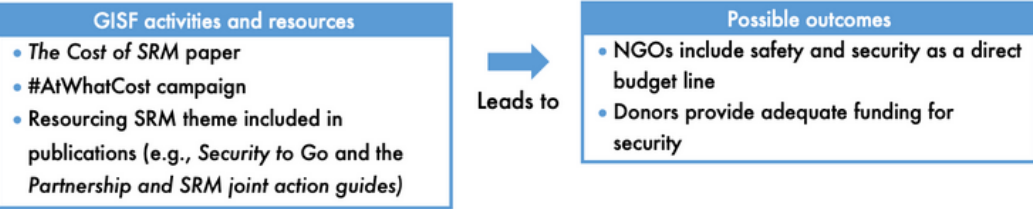
Figure 3: ELQ 2b



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



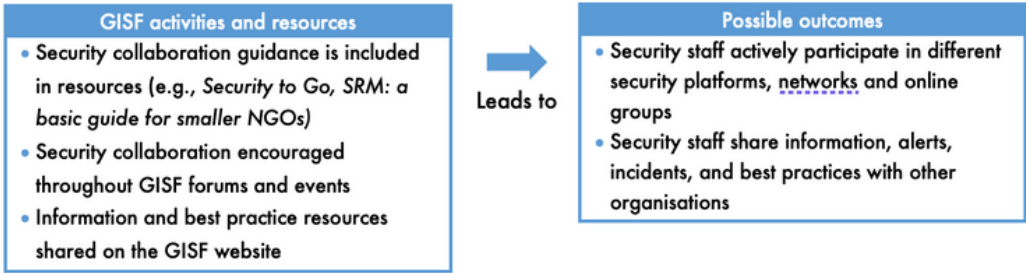
d) Security collaboration and information sharing

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.



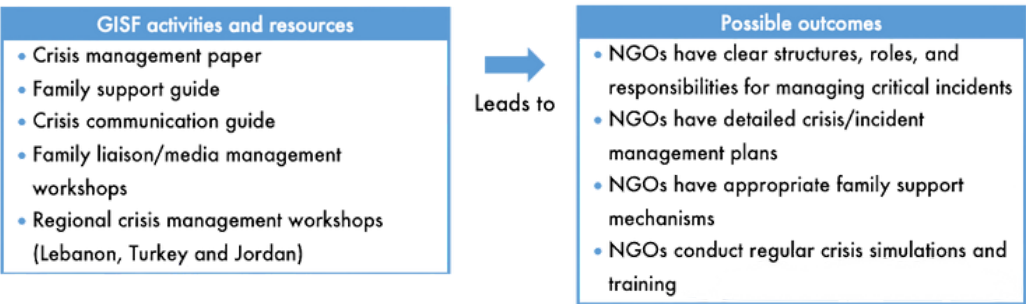
Figure 5: ELQ 2d



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/NGOs, 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

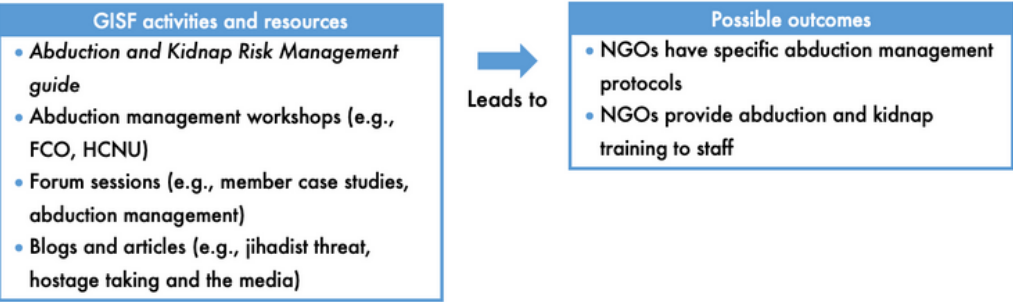
Figure 6: ELQ 2e



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

f) Abduction and kidnapping

Figure 7: ELQ 2f

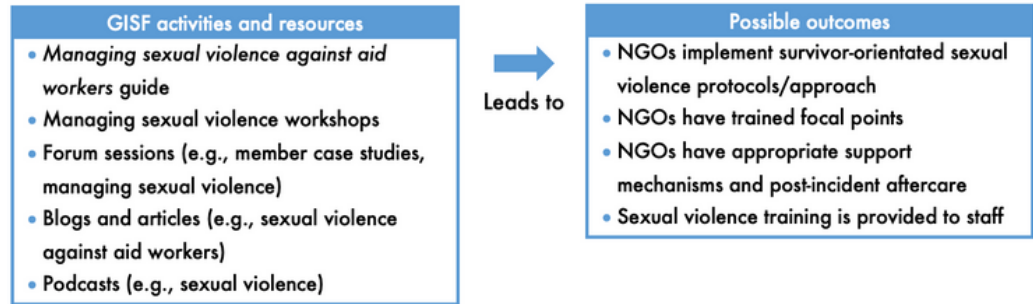


Several NGOs indicated that they have specific protocols and plans to manage abduction incidents. However, the high turnover of staff within organisations could pose the risk of a loss of knowledge and capacity gained from such experiences. Although most security staff were unfamiliar with GISC resources, of those that were, the GISC *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.

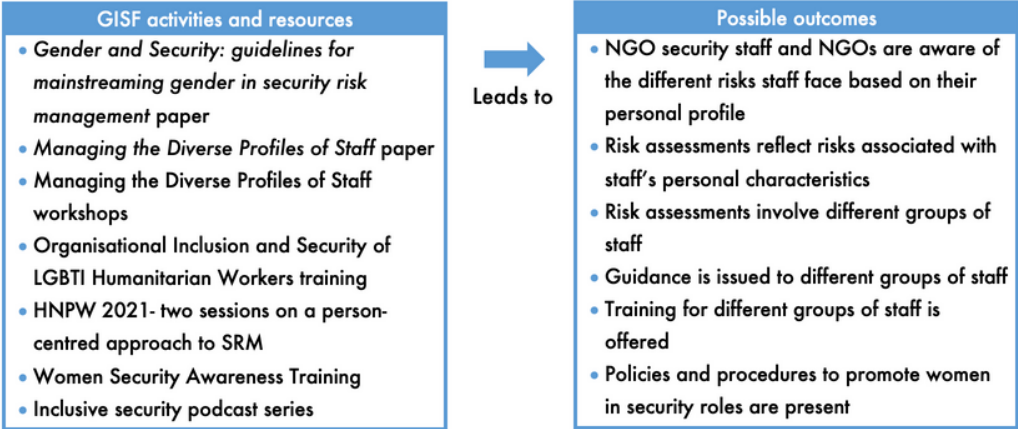
Figure 8: ELQ 2g



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 GISC’s *Managing Sexual Violence* guide helped the NGO develop its response measures.

h) Inclusive security

Figure 9: ELQ 2h

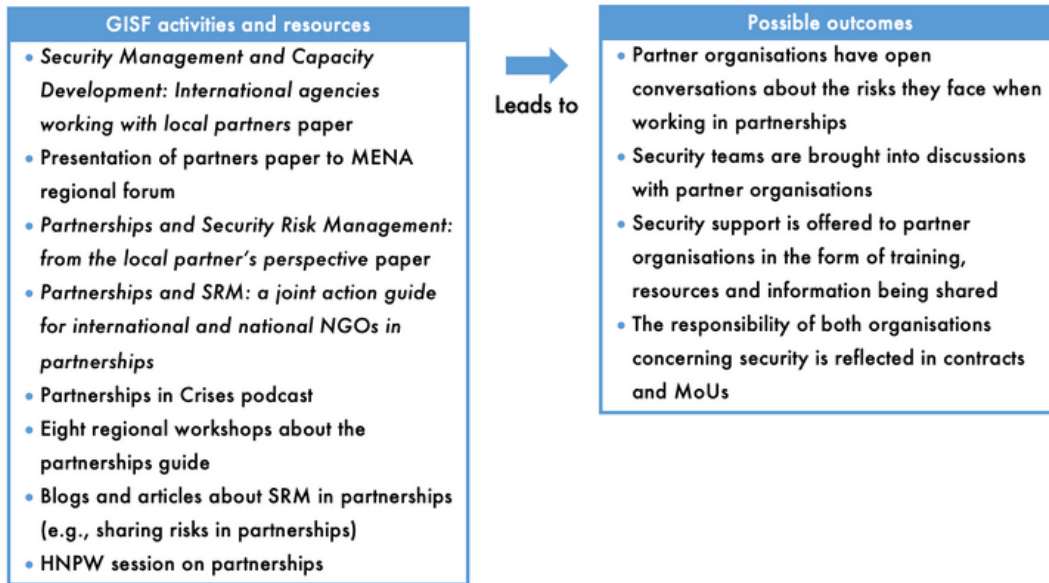


SRM practices around inclusive security in Iraq varied. Most NGOs issued safety and security guidance for female staff, but risks for LGBTQ+ staff were not accounted for as cultural sensitives were an obstacle to open discussions around risks for LGBTQ+ staff. Despite awareness of the risks linked to gender and ethnicity, these rarely seemed to be formally included in risk assessment processes. While GISC 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.

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 GISC’s joint action guide had directly influenced their partner security assessments. However, budgeting for security in partnerships still

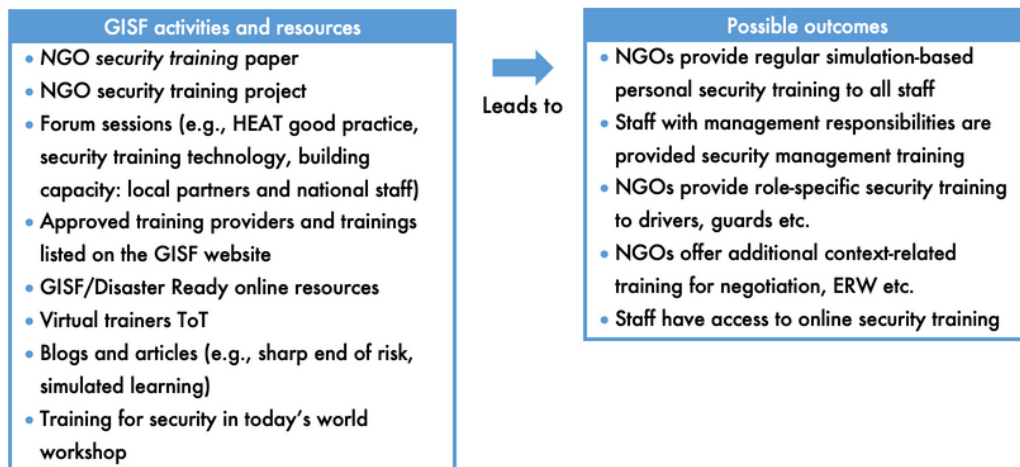
Figure 10: ELQ 2i



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.

j) Security training

Figure 11: ELQ2j



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

organisations required their international staff to complete Hostile Environment and Awareness Training (HEAT)-type courses 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.

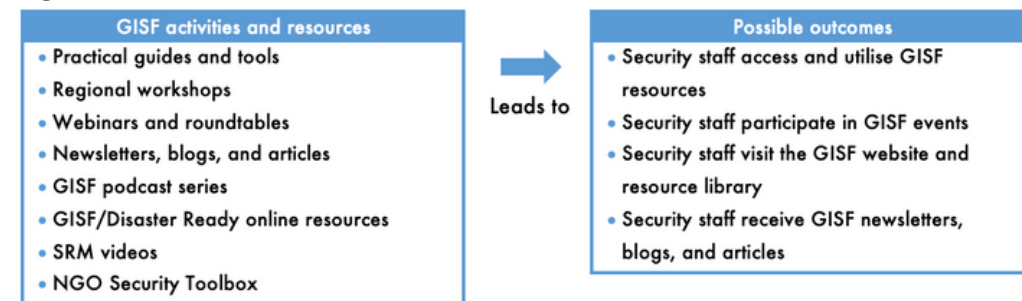


? ELQ3: How are GISF's resources and activities contributing to enhanced SRM skills and knowledge within Northern Iraq?

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



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

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

Conclusion

Overall, this study suggests a varying degree of influence of GISSF's activities and resources on SRM practices in Northern Iraq and limited awareness of GISSF among NGO security staff. This study identified many good SRM practices that echoed practices GISSF has advocated for. However, linking positive examples confidently to specific GISSF activities and resources was challenging. Furthermore, additional obstacles were created by the way GISSF 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 GISSF amongst security staff within Northern Iraq and the limited

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



The way NGOs prepare and disseminate resources internally makes it difficult to determine their connection to GISSF resources. GISSF'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 GISSF'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 GISSF's positive impact on humanitarian SRM and its ability to better understand its impact in the future.

Improving GISSF's engagement with staff at the operational level

The drive towards more local action underlines the need to reconsider how GISSF disseminates information at the operational level. To ensure that its resources reach the operational level, GISSF 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 GISSF and its resources.
- ☒ Encourage members to promote their GISSF membership and GISSF activities and resources more broadly within their organisations.
- ☒ Actively introduce and promote GISSF, its activities and resources within different security networks at the national and regional level regularly at events and meetings.

Improving how GISSF captures and measures the outcomes of its activities

To improve how GISSF captures and measures the outcomes of its activities, GISSF 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 GISSF 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 GISSF's influence.
- ☒ Conduct a multi-level organisational case study to enhance its understanding of how organisations utilise GISSF activities, resources, and information.