

HNPW 2024 Area of Common Concern:

# Integrating Security Risk Management Across Humanitarian Action

Since 2015, the [Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks \(HNPW\)](#) has been providing a critical platform for exchanging ideas to address key humanitarian issues. One of the largest humanitarian events of its kind, HNPW gathers participants from the United Nations, NGOs, Member States, the private sector, the military, academia and beyond to discuss and solve common challenges in humanitarian affairs.

This year, from 29 April to 10 May, the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) is pleased to have partnered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to lead on the subject of Integrating Security Risk Management In Humanitarian Action – one of nine areas of common concern (AoCC) for HNPW. Across the two-week event, there were 22 sessions under the security AoCC, with 1,149 participants. GISF led six of these sessions, with a total of 460 people in attendance.

On the first week of HNPW (29 April to 3 May), we offered a diverse array of virtual presentations on critical security risk management topics – from security in urban environments, to the role of private security companies in humanitarian settings.

On the second week of HNPW (6 May to 10 May), we were in-person at the International Conference Centre in Geneva, Switzerland where we offered a fascinating programme of events, including panel discussions on optimising resources, neutrality and localisation, and the recent [State of Practice Report](#).



**Protect Aid Workers: an innovative mechanism for safeguarding aid workers in high-risk environments** | Mon 29 April | Virtual | 15:00-16:00 CET

**Chair:** Heather Hughes (Head of Global Membership and NGO Services, GISF)

**Speakers:** David Annequin (Program Coordinator, Protect Aid Workers), Camille Delbourgo (Programme Manager, Legal Action Worldwide)

**Session notes:**

The Protect Aid Workers initiative launched in January 2024 and provides financial and legal support to aid workers who have suffered a critical incident while on duty. This might include violence, arrest, kidnapping, threats, or legal action against them. Individuals are eligible whether they are staff, contractors, or volunteers. Family of the aid worker can also be supported.

Grants of up to €10,000 are available – one grant per individual, per year. The grants are issued through the organisation of the aid worker and only DG ECHO certified partners can be the main recipients of the grants: for their own staff or on behalf of a national organisation. Non-ECHO-certified partners must be supported by an ECHO partner to access the grant. During the Q&A session, it was clarified that non-DG ECHO certified organisations can apply if they work with a partner who is certified. If not, they should still write to Protect Aid Workers and the team will see if there is a way to support the request.

Eligible organisations include: not-for-profit aid agencies, including NGOs, Red Cross, and community-based organisations. UN organisations are not eligible.

Eligible costs include medical support, mental health support, urgent relocation, replacement of items lost during an incident, coverage of a deceased aid worker's salary for family, and legal fees. At present, the project is restricted to the Middle-East, North Africa and South-West Asia, but there is scope for expansion in the next phase of the project. Further funding is expected after this pilot phase ends in December 2024.

The process for applying: send an application form via email, application is verified within 48 hours, (additional information might be requested), signature of sub-grant agreement, funds are transferred within one week of signing. So far 11 grants have been allocated.

There was also a presentation from Legal Action Worldwide, which is a partner in the Protect Aid Workers project. Legal Action Worldwide provides legal advice for aid workers as part of the Protect Aid Workers project in cases of arrest and detention. It is also providing mentorship and follow up on cases, analysis of needs, and a pool of professionals.



Legal Action Worldwide is also working on other projects that provide information and guidelines for aid workers. These materials will be available in English, French and Arabic. For legal advice, Legal Action Worldwide is connected to lawyers in different countries who speak local languages.

**Session outcomes and resources:**

Participants received the link to the [Protect Aid Workers materials](#) and were requested to share information on the project and 'get the word out'. Participants can be especially helpful by facilitating awareness of Protect Aid Workers among local implementing partners.

However, participants can also share the information within their own organisations, especially among HR departments and security teams. The information will soon be available on a public website (expected June 2024), which should also facilitate easier sharing/dissemination.

Participants can support the project by contacting the Protect Aid Workers team and informing them of potential cases. Even if cases fall outside the eligibility criteria, they should contact the team, as Protect

Aid Workers is a pilot project and the criteria may be adapted in future depending on the demands and needs. The more interactions the Protect Aid Workers project has, the more effective it can be.

The contact details were shared as follows:

You can ask any information about the project at:  
[director@protectaidworkers.org](mailto:director@protectaidworkers.org)

For specific cases, you can obtain support and send your grant application at: [hotline@protectaidworkers.org](mailto:hotline@protectaidworkers.org)

To contact Legal Action Worldwide:  
[aidworkers@legalactionworldwide.org](mailto:aidworkers@legalactionworldwide.org) or +41763962858  
(WhatsApp and Signal)

You can view the session recording here:  
[https://youtu.be/guNChUHoG\\_o?si=ZBxgJJIP2iYw7kNA](https://youtu.be/guNChUHoG_o?si=ZBxgJJIP2iYw7kNA)



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**Private Security Companies as a Security Risk Management Measure** | Thurs 2 May | Virtual | 11:00-12:30 CET

**Speakers:** Jael Amara (Business Development Director, Consumer Options), Gregory Beattie (Global Operations & Plans Manager, IDG Security), Vincent Bernard (Senior Policy Advisor, International Code of Conduct Association)

**Session notes:**

This session discussed the relations between the humanitarian sector and private security companies (PSCs).

A key trend highlighted by the speakers, has been the rise of humanitarian organisations contracting PSCs to secure their staff, assets and operations. As humanitarian NGOs operate in high-risk environments, they often consider contracting PSCs to mitigate their risks since these companies can provide security services that they may lack in house, are most cost-efficient, and can be rapidly deployed. Beyond the traditional guarding roles, PSCs provide all kinds of services including, cyber security, close protection measures, security and awareness training, risk reporting, and more.

While there has been an evolution between the humanitarian sector and PSCs, this has not been well documented in the past. GISS & [The International Code of Conduct Association's \(ICoCA\) 2021 research report](#), an attempt to remedy this knowledge gap, explores the under-explored facet of the rise of PSCs and their impact on humanitarian action and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

What are the key risks for humanitarian organisations when contracting security providers?

- The transfer of liability to PSCs could damage the reputation of the hiring organisation, which could jeopardise acceptance from local groups and communities.
- The behaviour of PSC guards can damage the reputation of the hiring organisation both locally and internationally.
- Budget restrictions may force organisations to contract PSCs that do not meet their standards or quality requirements.
- Organisations may be subject to contractual liability if they don't do due diligence.

The risks of contracting PSCs are multifaceted and not just limited to humanitarian organisations. Since humanitarian organisations are driven by budget constraints, this often results in ethical dilemmas that affect local security personnel.

Local guards may:

- Have low salaries, that are often delayed.

- Work long hours without sufficient rest.
- Have no contracts, meaning no employer protection.
- Suffer from poor performance due to hunger and fatigue.
- Suffer mental health challenges due to high levels of stress.
- Engage in unlawful behaviour due to poor working conditions, putting local communities at risk.

### Session outcomes and resources:

When contracting with private security providers, many risks are present, but these are often not considered in the contracting process. Humanitarian organisations must fully acknowledge the risks associated with PSCs. They should work towards more responsible contracting which respects humanitarian principles and ensure their partnerships with PSCs do not breach any applicable duty of care. This ICoCA [policy brief](#) and [report](#) identifies several solutions and recommendations which organisations should follow.

The following resources can also help humanitarian organisations to responsibly contract PSCs:

ICoCA training on “Using Private Security in Humanitarian Organisations”: <https://icoca.learningpool.com>

Module 14 of the GISF “Security To Go Risk Management Toolkit” on responsible private security contracting for humanitarian organisations: [https://gisf.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GISF\\_Security-to-Go\\_Module-14\\_Oct20.pdf](https://gisf.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GISF_Security-to-Go_Module-14_Oct20.pdf)



ICoCA policy brief on “When the Abused Becomes the Abuser: Poor working conditions in the private security industry undermine human rights compliance”: <https://icoca.ch/2023/12/14/when-the-abused-becomes-the-abuser-policy-brief-report/>

### You can watch the session recording here:

<https://youtu.be/6CaaBp3HFnc?si=2Ldqv97Udic4JUOO>

**Security in Urban and Densely Populated Environments** | Thurs 2 May | Virtual | 16:00-17:30 CET

**Chair:** Dimitri Kotsiras (GISF Research and Programmes Manager)

**Speakers:** Rob Grace (Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science, Boston University), Shashwat Saraf (Regional Emergency Director – East Africa, International Rescue Committee), Roman Antoni Cioma (Security Specialist – Ukraine, UN Women)

### Session notes:

The world has rapidly urbanised in recent decades. As a result, we are seeing an increasing movement of conflict into urban spaces.

There are particular nuances and challenges that come with operating humanitarian responses in urban spaces. For example, cities generally have: high population densities, a range of diverse needs among diverse populations, additional risks from urban violence and crime, and focal areas which may be targets for attacks, such as government buildings.

These particularities might necessitate specific security risk management approaches.

Despite this, there has been limited research on humanitarian security risk management in urban spaces. The session aimed to draw out responses from participants to determine: a) whether focusing on urban contexts as a particular domain of security risk management is helpful, b) whether the issues discussed resonate with the experiences of participants and if they have urban security risk management stories, challenges faced, or approaches taken to share.

To stimulate the discussion, some insights from the Ukraine context were provided. In Ukraine, the main threat is from missiles. This poses challenges for humanitarian organisations for several reasons. Firstly, it is difficult for organisations to find offices and other operating locations, as they need to keep a distance from potential targets, including government buildings, military installations, power generation facilities, railway lines, and more. Another challenge is the frequency of air raid alerts. Humanitarian staff experience complacency and fatigue around alerts and there is a danger of them failing to respond. It is important for security managers to model good behaviours (such as always immediately going to a shelter when an alert sounds) but individual staff will ultimately make their own decisions. If staff are injured or killed and they have not taken the appropriate precautions, then any insurance claims are invalid.

The session included several insights from participants, including:

- A comment on the situation in Haiti, where staff live with the daily reality of gang violence in the community. In this context, a comfortable and secure work environment can be a 'place to recharge the batteries'.
- Some discussion on how acceptance can be achieved in urban environments by designing programmes with communities in mind and a complaints mechanism for beneficiaries to raise concerns. When mistakes are made, it is important to be honest and work on solutions.
- Some discussion on psychosocial support in the urban context. The importance of personalised and contextualised self-care plans was raised. While security risk management plans are often contextualised, they may not always include a psychosocial component. It's important to remember that individuals who are struggling mentally and lack appropriate resilience may experience difficulties in concentration and decision-making. These abilities are crucial for making appropriate decisions during critical and heightened security incidents.

### Session outcomes and resources:

There is ample room for more research on urban security risk management. The [recent GISF report](#) on the subject mainly highlights the challenges. The next step is to find solutions.

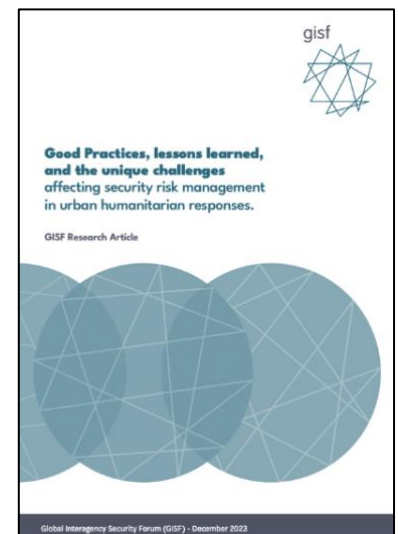
To facilitate this, Rob Grace (author of the report), requests inputs from professionals with experience in humanitarian security operations in urban settings. Any reactions to the report, stories or perspectives can be directed to: [robgrace@brandeis.edu](mailto:robgrace@brandeis.edu).

A final question was also left with the audience on the subject of risk. In some urban contexts (such as Kyiv, Ukraine) threats are difficult to mitigate against (such as missiles). So, organisations have to make decisions on how much risk they are willing to accept in pursuit of their humanitarian goals.

Key resources:

- [Confronting Humanitarian Insecurity: The Law and Politics of Responding to Attacks against Aid Workers](#), by Julia Brooks and Rob Grace, Journal of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020.
- [The Humanitarian as Negotiator: Developing Capacity Across the Sector](#), by Rob Grace, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2017.
- [Humanitarian Negotiation with Parties to Armed Conflict: The Role of Laws and Principles in the Discourse](#), by Rob Grace, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2020.
- [When Security Risk Management and Technology Collide: getting humanitarian notification systems right](#), by Rob Grace & GISF, 2023.

You can watch the session recording here: <https://youtu.be/-CVqFXkPunY?si=Z7Q-oWrrur9mZfGSL>



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**Optimising Resources and Collaborative Strategies in Field Security for Humanitarian Impact: 2023 Lessons Learned** | Mon 6 May | In-Person | 09:00-10:30 CET

**Chair:** Jon Novakovic (GISF Executive Director)

**Speakers:** Paul Farrell (UNICEF Principal Security Coordinator), Florence Poussin (UNDSS Deputy Director, Division of Field Operations), Neil Elliot (Oxfam Global Head of Security), Guibril Camara (UNHCR Senior Field Security Officer), Zina Abdin (UN Women Deputy Regional Security Specialist).

#### Session notes:

The panel reflected on some of the security risk management challenges of 2023. It was recognised that 2023 was a particularly difficult year for humanitarian crises. UNHCR declared 43 new emergencies over the course of the year. Major crises included the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria, conflict in Gaza, and insecurity in the Sahel. In this context, one strategy has been for organisations to increase their preparedness and resilience – so as not to be in ‘crisis mode’ each time an emergency strikes. The panellists then offered several more suggestions for improving their field security, with a focus on optimising resources.

One key element echoed across the panel was for the need to ensure security is embedded throughout an organisation. This is not only a good way of optimising resources, but it also ensures that good security practices can continue to function even in settings where a security focal point may not be present.

Cooperating with partners was also highlighted as good way of optimising resources. For UN agencies, this might be through the Department for Safety and Security (DSS) and other UN organisations. It can include cost sharing for equipment, such as armoured vehicles. For NGOs, this might be through GISF, the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) and other security networks which provide free resources. It was noted by the panel that some regional security platforms are also becoming more active.

The need for digital transformation was echoed by several panellists. Technology is acknowledged as an important tool to make managers’ and security advisors’ time more efficient, but it can also be used to improve context analysis and other key elements of security risk management.

Budgeting was also highlighted as a key element in ensuring adequate resources for security. It was noted that security is often not included in NGO proposal budgets and that one solution could be creating budget templates which ensure security is included as standard.

Finally, it was noted that security is often seen as an additional cost, but it is actually an investment which saves money over the long term. Good security risk management saves money by avoiding losses – for instance, loss of vehicles through carjackings.



## Session outcomes and resources:

The discussion offered many suggestions for actions panellists and participants could take. For example, for those working in larger organisations, it was suggested that they can advocate with large donors to ensure security is included as part of proposal budgets. This could also help to influence a 'trickle down' effect so that this standard is adopted by smaller donors funding small NGOs.

Small organisations were especially encouraged to engage with security focal points at other organisations through networks like GISF and INSO. In this way, the conversation can continue, and organisations can learn from each other for more effective and efficient security risk management.

You can watch the session recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SXotxMO1BA>

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**State of Practice: The Evolution of Security Risk Management in the Humanitarian Space** | Wed 8 May | In-Person | 14:00-15:30 CET

**Speakers:** Mariana Duque-Diez (Research Assistant, Humanitarian Outcomes), Abby Stoddard (Partner, Humanitarian Outcomes), Dimitri Kotsiras (Research and Programmes Manager, GISF)

The session began by introducing the State of Practice report – a collaboration between Humanitarian Outcomes and the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF). The report draws on interviews, survey data, country-based research, and more to summarise the developments in security risk management in recent years and decades.

Some key points from the report include:

- The annual total of aid worker fatalities has gradually increased since 2000
- This increase is not explained only by the increase in the aid worker population, as illustrated by the data indicating growing attack rates and fatality rates
- There have been security advances within international organisations, but these have not been replicated in national organisations
- There are some 'perverse incentives' which can cause NGOs to cut costs for security
- There is often a divide between access professionals and security professionals.

Following this summary of the State of Practice report, GISF provided some updates on what other research it has been involved with since:

- Recent publications cover topics such as humanitarian security in urban environments and digital risks
- Upcoming research includes a security risk management guide/toolkit and a report on neutrality, access and localisation
- Future areas for research could include resourcing for security risk management, more on digital security, and research on the nexus of localisation and security risk management.

GISF has also been involved with the [Protect Aid Workers project](#) which provides financial and legal assistance for aid workers who have experienced a serious incident. There was a session on this project during the virtual week of HNPW.

GISF has also partnered with Humanitarian Outcomes and other organisations, led by INTERSOS, on the Partage project. This project aims to assess and improve security risk management capacities of NGOs in the Sahel. The project has started with a desk-based review of existing resources, 59 online and in-person interviews, and six workshops in Mali and Burkina Faso. Some key findings so far include:

- There is not a single security context in the Sahel – adaptation should be based on the size and capacities of each organisation, rather than the context

- There are some common security risk management concerns: a need to formalise security risk management processes, budget constraints, engaging with non-humanitarian actors, security while on the move (e.g. while on the road)
- Adaptation is not enough – support is needed for applying tools
- Language and complexity are the main obstacles – tools need to be practical and should be in French and other local languages.



#### **Session outcomes and resources:**

Humanitarian Outcomes will release the new Aid Worker Security Database report later in 2024. The theme for this year's report is advocacy. Participants were invited to follow up with the Humanitarian Outcomes team to provide their inputs on this theme through Zoom interviews.

Humanitarian Outcomes are also working on the updated version of the Good Practice Review, which will be released in autumn 2024. Participants were invited to sign up to receive notice of the publication as soon as it was released.

Printed copies of the [State of Practice report](#) were distributed to the participants for them to explore the topics discussed in more detail.

**No session recording.**

**Are neutrality, localisation and acceptance still inextricably linked in security?** | Thurs 9 May | In-Person | 14:00-15:30 CET

**Chair:** Dimitri Kotsiras (GISF Research and Programmes Manager)

**Speakers:** Anaide Nahikian (Senior researcher affiliated with Harvard Humanitarian Initiative), Emmanuel Tronc (Senior researcher affiliated with Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Head of Outreach & Engagement at H2H Network)

#### **Session notes:**

This session unpacked the challenges in conceptualising and operationalising the principle of neutrality, looking at how its role in acceptance-based strategies has evolved over time, and explored its interaction with the localisation of aid. The session built off an upcoming report exploring this intersection, 'Neutrality, Access, and Making Localisation Work.'



The session began with an outline of three key findings from conversations with stakeholders around the principle of neutrality:

1. It is clear that strict adherence to neutrality will cut opportunities for engagement with local actors. This strict adherence is something that should be critically discussed.
2. Humanitarian actors engage with neutrality in three different ways: 1) as a strategy (most common), 2) as a political stance and 3) as a moral stance.
3. The more you engage with the principle of neutrality, the less capacity you have to respond to the priorities of affected communities.

The majority of the findings for the upcoming report are based on literature reviews and in-depth interviews with local practitioners (national staff of international and national NGOs).

A number of key findings from these interviews were presented during the session:

- A common question that arose among interviewees is whether it is essential for humanitarian actors to be neutral. Can one engage in humanitarian work without being neutral? How can one conceive being neutral in a situation that is so politically charged?
  - o One interviewee said that “neutrality is meaningless – it comes from the mouth not the heart.”
  - o Humanitarian actors can present their work as being neutral but in reality, this may not be true.
- Interviewees mentioned how taking sides should not be about being on one side or the other but rather being equal distance.
- Another issue raised was pressure from donors to demonstrate neutrality. Neutrality is viewed as an issue of compliance and visibility. Some organisations have to penalise staff that are too visible (e.g. putting up flags) to demonstrate to their donor that they are taking action.
  - o Local actors feel they don't have the autonomy to work as they wish and this is what causes the resistance to embracing and operating in a way that INGOs would see as being neutral.

### **Session outcomes and resources:**

This session built off an upcoming report exploring, 'Neutrality, Access, and Making Localisation Work.' The report will be published by the GISF in 2024. The report is in currently progress but will be shared with participants once finished.

**You can watch the session recording here:**

[https://youtu.be/E2\\_woG9U6iU?si=2FN5wPzZ7I9DL8\\_P](https://youtu.be/E2_woG9U6iU?si=2FN5wPzZ7I9DL8_P)

