

The Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) Glossary

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A Glossary of terms for NGO
security risk management

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The Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) Glossary

Terms for NGO security risk management

The Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) developed this Glossary to facilitate a common understanding of terms frequently used in NGO security risk management.

The terms and definitions have been drawn from a range of trusted resources, including GISF's own publications. They have also been informed by a working group of GISF members.

The GISF Glossary is also available online in four languages: English, French, Spanish and Arabic. The site has been designed to enable easy navigation between terms in each language, supporting more consistent and accurate communication across language barriers. You can find the online versions at gisf.ngo.



About the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF)

The Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) is a diverse network of member organisations active in the fields of humanitarian aid, international development, human rights, and environmental protection, who value security risk management (SRM) as an important element of their operations and programme delivery. In a rapidly changing global landscape, GISF values the importance of continuous documentation, adaptation, and innovation of SRM policy and practice. Therefore, we take an inclusive approach to SRM and don't believe in 'one-size-fits-all' security. We recognise that different staff face different risks, based on the diversity of their personal profile, position, context, and organisation. In summary, we are the leading NGO SRM network and a one-stop-shop for information sharing, knowledge management, coordination, and collaboration.

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A

Abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO)

Related terms: explosive, explosive remnants of war (ERW), improvised explosive device (IED), unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Any type of explosive weapon, such as bombs, shells, grenades, landmines, or munitions that has been left behind and is no longer under military control.

These ordnances can remain hazardous long after the conflict has ended.

Definition adapted from The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).


African Union Mission In Somalia (AMISOM) Public Information

Somalia

A piece of abandoned explosive ordnance is shown at a demonstration by the United Nations Mine Action Service.



Abduction


 **Related terms:** detention, hostage, kidnapping.

The forcible capture of one or more persons without demands.

Kidnap and hostage situations are considered abductions until demands related to their release are received.

Definition adapted from GISF's Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management guide.

Abuse

 **Related terms:** abuse of power, harassment.

A deliberate act with actual or potential negative effects upon a person's safety, wellbeing, dignity, and development.

It usually takes place in the context of a relationship of authority, responsibility, trust, or power.

Definition adapted from 'Discussion Paper: Review of Existing Definitions and Explanations of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Violence against Children', The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

Abuse of power


 **Related term:** abuse.

The use of a position of influence, power, or authority for private gain and/or to harm or coerce another person or place them at a disadvantage.

Within NGOs, this can be committed by anyone with power over another, e.g., manager, aid worker, donor, etc.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Acceptance approach

 **Related terms:** acceptance strategy, deterrence strategy, protection strategy, security strategy.

An approach to security risk management that attempts to negate a threat through building relationships with local communities and relevant stakeholders in the operational area and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the organisation's presence and its work.

In security risk management, acceptance involves recognising certain risks and choosing to tolerate them when the cost of prevention is too high compared to the potential impact. It complements protection, which focuses on safeguarding assets through defensive measures, and deterrence, which aims to discourage threats by making the consequences of an attack clear. Together, these strategies form a balanced approach to managing security risks efficiently and effectively.

Definition adapted from Good Practice Review 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments.

Acceptance strategy

Related terms: acceptance approach, deterrence strategy, protection strategy, security strategy.

A security risk management strategy that involves building positive relationships and cultivating and maintaining consent from communities, local authorities, armed groups, and other key stakeholders.

An acceptance strategy seeks to reduce or remove threats by developing and maintaining widespread acceptance for the organisation's presence and activities by stakeholders.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Achieving safe operations through acceptance'.

Accident

Related term: incident.

An unintentional event, typically sudden in nature, that results in injury, damage, loss, or harm to an organisation, its staff and/or programmes.

Accidents are usually associated with safety events, such as fires, vehicle collisions, etc, unless there is an element of intent.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook, GISF.

Actor mapping

Related term: stakeholder analysis.

An exercise to identify key actors / stakeholders in a given environment that will have an effect on your organisation's programmes and the operating environment.

Actor mapping can help to determine how different actors/stakeholders positively or

negatively impact the security environment and risks to the organisation, its staff, and its activities.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Risk Management (SRM) Toolkit: Assessments.

After action review (AAR)

Related term: post-incident review.

An assessment conducted to evaluate the decisions and actions that were made during the response to a crisis or incident.

AARs are usually conducted after the crisis response phase is complete. An AAR can help to identify lessons learned and address concerns about how things were handled. While this is a valuable process, it should be done to inform future planning and decisions.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Risk Management (SRM) Toolkit: Assessments.

Aftercare

Related term: psychological first aid.

The provision of psychosocial, ongoing medical, and practical support after an incident (for example, medical treatment, mental health support, additional paid leave). Aftercare is provided to victims, staff involved, their family, and others who may have been affected by the incident or involved in the crisis response.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Managing the Message: Communication and media management in a security crisis'.

Aid workers

Employees and associated personnel of aid groups (local, national, and international) that provide material and/or technical assistance in humanitarian contexts.

This includes both emergency relief and multi-mandated (relief and development) organisations: NGOs, the International Movement of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, donor agencies and all the UN agencies belonging to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (IASC) as well as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Definition adapted from the Aid Worker Security Database.



Ambush

A surprise attack made from a concealed position. Ambushes are often used to force a vehicle(s) to stop so that assailants can then rob, abduct, or attack the occupants.

Definition adapted from Good Practice Review 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments.

Armed activity

Related terms:
armed rebellion,
non-state armed
groups (NSAG).

Actions involving the use of weapons, often carried out by military, paramilitary, law enforcement or insurgent and criminal groups. In the context of security risk management, armed activity includes a variety of potential risks and scenarios, including terrorist attacks, armed robbery, political violence and civil unrest.

Armed rebellion

Related terms:
armed activity,
mutiny.

An organised, violent uprising by a group or faction against a government or ruling authority.

These rebellions are often motivated by political, social, or economic grievances and can pose significant risks to security and safety in the affected regions.

Arrest

 **Related term:** detention.

The detention and seizure of an individual or group by a formal authority (police or military) in connection with a crime, offence, or infraction and where the person is not free to leave.

For an arrest to be lawful, the arresting party must hold the power of arrest and the arrest must be carried out according to the law.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


Arson

Any fire that damages property or endangers people that is caused intentionally.

Arson includes, but is not limited to, the use of incendiary devices, the intentional sabotage of electrical systems or gas lines/tanks, and the use of an accelerant to destroy the property.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Attack

 **Related terms:** beating, digital attack.

An act aimed at an organisation, its staff and/or programmes with the intention to cause damage, harm, injury, or death.

Attacks are often manifested as violent physical acts targeting a person or persons. However, they can also be manifested in the digital space, with both direct attacks (e.g. computer viruses) and indirect attacks (e.g. phishing emails) that seek to damage or harm an organisation and its staff.

Definition adapted from GISF's module Security To Go: A Risk Management Toolkit for Humanitarian Aid Agencies (Module 4).

OCMA/Hallforsson




Syria
An agricultural field burns in an incident of suspected arson.



B

Beating

 **Related term:** attack.

An incident in which the victim is repeatedly assaulted physically, usually carried out with body parts (fists, feet) or objects (sticks or bats or pipes).

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Bias


 **Related term:** discrimination.

The unfair inclination or prejudice for or against a particular group that influences personal judgement, based on 'race', ethnicity, and other identity characteristics, including gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status.

These can be conscious or unconscious. There are four main dimensions of bias: structural (maintenance of biased policies and practices by multiple institutions); institutional (policies and practices that reinforce prejudice); interpersonal (acts and micro-aggressions between individuals); internalised (subtle and overt messages by individuals).

Definition adapted from GISF's guide 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations'.

Biological weapon


 **Related terms:** chemical weapon, nuclear weapon, radiological weapon.

Bribery

The provision of money, gifts, or favours to influence the decision, judgement, or conduct of someone.

Bribery is illegal in many countries and is also in breach of most organisations' staff behavioural codes.

Burglary

 **Related terms:** robbery, theft.

Unlawful entry into property, usually with the intention of theft, without the use of a weapon (also referred to as a break-in or home invasion).

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Business continuity

The strategic and procedural planning that an organisation undertakes to ensure that essential functions can continue during and after a disruptive event.

This is a critical step for maintaining resilience, protecting assets, and minimising downtime in the face of various security threats.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide Security Risk Management (SRM) Strategy and Policy Development: A Cross-Functional Guide.

An instrument or device used to disseminate disease-causing organisms or toxins produced by living organisms in order to harm or kill.

Definition adapted from the Biological Weapons Convention, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

UN Geneva Violence Martini

Switzerland

A United Nations meeting takes place to discuss the development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons.




C

Carjacking

The theft of a vehicle from its driver by force, violence, and intimidation (also referred to as a vehicle hijacking).

Definition adapted from Good Practice Review 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments.

Casualty evacuation (CASEVAC)

 **Related terms:** evacuation, medical evacuation (MEDEVAC).

Casualty evacuation refers to the movement of a sick/injured person by non-medical transport, with no medical support on-board. With a CASEVAC the emphasis is on moving a person with an acute or life-threatening condition urgently from their current location to the nearest medical facility so they can receive care.

Charges

 **Related terms:** arrest, detention.

Formal legal accusation made by a governmental authority asserting that a person or organisation has committed a crime.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Checkpoint

A barrier or manned entrance erected to monitor or control the movement of people and vehicles.

Checkpoints may be formal or informal, and permanent or random. Illegal checkpoints or roadblocks are often a source of harassment, or used to gain money, goods, or commit crimes.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


World Health Organization

Poland

Refugees from Ukraine pass through a [checkpoint](#) to cross the border into Poland.



Chemical weapon

 **Related terms:**
biological weapon,
nuclear weapon,
radiological weapon.

Civil-military coordination

An instrument or device used to disperse chemical compounds, usually toxic agents, in order to kill, injure, or incapacitate people.

Definition adapted from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Essential dialogue and interaction between military forces and humanitarian organisations/civilian actors to promote humanitarian principles, secure access, protect staff and beneficiaries, and in some instances, to support the delivery of assistance.

Alternative terms include CMCoord and Humanitarian Military Interaction (HMI).

Civil-military coordination is a humanitarian concept, whereas civil-military co-operation (CIMIC) is the military concept.

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Toolbox.

Civil unrest

An umbrella term to describe a wide spectrum of violent and non-violent group acts.

Civil unrest can be manifested as limited political violence (such as acts of 'terrorism', individual assassinations, etc.), sporadic violent collective action (such as riots), or nonviolent and mildly violent collective action (such as protests, demonstrations, etc.) – all of which tend to take place in times of peace.

Definition adapted from United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

Communications tree

A phone, text, email, and social media distribution list for all stakeholders and individuals that may need to be contacted in a crisis.

It should have a clear indication of who is responsible for contacting each group or person on the list, and in which format. This allows information to be cascaded down the tree rapidly.

Confidentiality

 **Related term:** disclosure.

A set of rules or a promise to keep specific information private, or to only disclose information to a limited number of persons.

Maintaining confidentiality means not disclosing any information at any time to any party without the informed consent of the person concerned.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Consequential loss

A secondary result ensuing from an action or decision.

From an insurance or security standpoint, it consists of additional costs, loss, or damage beyond the value of the asset lost or damaged, including other indirect costs.

Definition adapted from ASIS International's General Security Risk Assessment Guidelines.

Context analysis

A systematic process of understanding the environment in which an organisation operates to identify potential security threats and vulnerabilities.

It often entails an activity to identify the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (e.g. PESTEL) factors that influence risk in the context where your organisation is working and provides insight into how these factors may affect your organisation, staff, and programmes.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

Contingency plan

🔗 **Related terms:** control, protocols.

A set of pre-established procedures and measures adapted to your local context that guide staff in coordinating a rapid and effective response to specific security incidents or situations.

These plans aim to minimise the impact of security incidents, ensure business continuity and facilitate rapid and effective responses.

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Toolbox.

Control

🔗 **Related terms:** risk mitigation.

A measure and/or mechanism that maintains and/or modifies risk.

A control in security risk management includes any process, policy, procedure, device or practice to mitigate risk. These controls can be preventive (e.g. physical security), detective (e.g. audits and reviews) or corrective (e.g. incident response) in nature.

Definition adapted from ISO 31000: 2018.

Convoy

A group of vehicles (or ships) travelling together in an organised manner for mutual support and protective purposes.

Definition adapted from Good Practice Review 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments.

Counter-terrorism

🔗 **Related term:** terrorism.

Actions and strategies used by governments and security forces (police, military) to monitor, disrupt, prevent, and investigate terrorist activity.

For example, counter-terrorism laws and other measures intended to limit the provision of funds to specific groups in order to prevent them carrying out terrorist acts.

Coup

🔗 **Related terms:** armed rebellion, mutiny.

A sudden, often violent, and unlawful seizure of power from a government (also referred to as a coup d'état).

Whether successful or not, or violent or not, an attempted coup may be politically destabilising.


Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Myanmar

A family that was displaced from their home following a coup walks close to the border with Thailand.



Crisis

 **Related terms:** critical incident, incident.

An event (or series of events) that significantly disrupts an organisation's normal operations and has severe consequences for individual staff or the organisation, requiring an immediate response beyond normal management mechanisms to restore order and normality.

Crises can include events threatening an organisation's reputation, image, programmes, assets, financial stability, or the safety and security of its staff. In this last case, a crisis may be precipitated by a critical incident.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication Crisis Management of Critical Incidents.

Crisis management exercise (CME)

 **Related term:** scenario planning.

A controlled activity designed to simulate real-life situations for the purpose of training, assessing crisis management capabilities, and testing response procedures and plans.

CMEs are proactive tools used to progressively build an organisation's capacity to manage a wide range of critical situations involving staff and operations.


Definition adapted from GISF's 'NGO crisis management exercise manual'.

Crisis management plan

An organisation-wide document that describes the mechanisms, responsibilities, and protocols to be activated by an organisation in the event of a crisis (also referred to as a crisis management protocol).

Definition adapted from GISF's publication Crisis Management of Critical Incidents.

Crisis management team (CMT)

 **Related terms:** decision-making authority (DMA), incident management team (IMT).

A designated group created and activated for the purpose of managing an organisation's response to a crisis and liaising with all stakeholders involved.

The CMT composition and role varies according to the type of crisis or situation, its location and the level of support required.

Some organisations have CMTs at their head office and incident management teams (IMTs) at country and local levels, while others refer to CMTs at all levels.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication Crisis Management of Critical Incidents.

Critical incident

 **Related terms:** crisis, incident.

An event or series of events that seriously threatens the welfare of personnel, potentially resulting in death, life-threatening injury or illness.

Most critical incidents do not have wider impacts on the organisation as a whole and are thus managed by regular management structures, with additional support from headquarters if required. A critical incident can become a crisis when its nature, severity or broader consequences for an organisation warrant a response beyond the capacity of regular management structures.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication Crisis Management of Critical Incidents.

Crossfire

Related term: shooting.

Any situation in which small arms fire is used indiscriminately or weapons are being fired from two or more directions passing through the same area.

In this situation, individuals may not be specifically targeted, but their presence puts them at risk of being shot.

Curfew

The imposition of restrictions regarding travel and movement, often requiring everyone to stay home between particular times.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Iraq

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries imposed curfews to prevent the spread of the disease.



Cyber attack

Related term: cyber exploitation.

An attempt to damage, disrupt, or gain unauthorised access to computer systems, networks, or devices (also referred to as a cybercrime or hack).

Definition adapted from the National Cyber Security Centre (UK).

Cyber exploitation

Related terms: cyber attack, cyber security.

The act of monitoring and related espionage on computer systems, often over an extended period, in order to obtain information or to copy data from these systems (also referred to as cyber espionage).


Cyber security

Related terms: cyber attack, cyber exploitation.

The protection of devices, services, networks and data from unauthorised access, attacks, damage, or theft. Cyber security involves identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks related to digital assets to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.

D


Data back-ups

 **Related terms:**
cyber security, data
destruction.

The process of duplicating and storing data from an organisation's information systems in a secure location to protect data loss, corruption, theft or damage.

This practice ensures that data can be restored to its original state after a security incident, hardware failure, accidental deletion, or a natural disaster.

Data destruction

 **Related terms:**
cyber security, data
back-ups.

The process of destroying data stored on hard disks and other forms of electronic media so that it is completely unreadable and cannot be accessed or used for unauthorised purposes (also referred to as data disposal or shredding).

Security information management requires sensitive information to be clearly separated from routine information in case the destruction of data needs to be done quickly.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Decision-making authority (DMA)

Related terms: crisis management team (CMT), incident management team (IMT).

The individual(s) or group responsible for making strategic decisions and who are accountable for the success or failure of any actions.

During a crisis, the DMA is tasked with ensuring the crisis management team (CMT) is enabled to manage the incident effectively. They approve the incident management strategy but are not involved in the day-to-day management of the crisis.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Demonstration

Related term: protest.

Mass gathering of people for a political or social purpose that is non-violent. This includes protests, marches, sit-ins, picketing etc.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Detention

Related terms: arrest, kidnapping.

The process of holding a person/people against their will by an individual or group. While there may be no intention to cause harm, there is also no clear timeline or pre-condition for their release.

Reasons for detention can range from a perceived crime or offence, documentation problems, unhappiness with an organisation or its programmes, to concerns for the 'security' of the detainees. A detention may become an arrest when formal charges are made by the detaining authority.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Deterrence strategy

Related terms: acceptance strategy, protection strategy, security strategy.

A security strategy that involves reducing or removing threats by posing a counter-threat that will deter or influence aggressors.

Examples include armed protection, diplomatic/political leverage, temporary suspension of activities or programme closure as a security strategy.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

Digital security

Related terms: cyber attack, cyber exploitation.

Measures, strategies, and processes that aim to mitigate risks related to the use of digital technologies and an individual's and/or organisation's digital presence.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

South Sudan

Local residents organise a silent demonstration to demand accountability for the humanitarian community's shortcomings in safeguarding their lives.



Disclosure

 **Related term:** confidentiality.

The process of revealing information. A disclosure is usually made with a degree of confidentiality.

It refers to how a person learns about an event/experience. Disclosure is often a process rather than a single/specific event.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Discrimination

 **Related term:** inclusion.

The unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on protected characteristics such as 'race', ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or other personal attributes.

It involves actions, policies, or practices that result in unequal opportunities or outcomes for certain groups, often perpetuating social inequality or exclusion.


Disinformation

 **Related term:** misinformation.

False or inaccurate information that is shared with the explicit intent to mislead or cause harm.

Definition adapted from Frontline Negotiations – 'How to manage misinformation'.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

 **Related terms:** discrimination, inclusion.

Refers to strategies and practices aimed at creating a workplace where diverse perspectives are valued, equitable opportunities are provided, and all individuals feel included and respected.

It often entails establishing organisational policies, structures, systems and programmes that promote more diversity, equity and inclusion.

'Do no harm'

An organisation's responsibility to minimise the harm they may be doing inadvertently as a result of their organisational activities.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Dual mandate organisations

Organisations that work in both humanitarian and development programming.

This may also include multi-mandated organisations working on human rights, advocacy, peacebuilding, conflict resolution etc.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Management and Capacity Development: International agencies working with local partners'.

Duty of care

 **Related term:** liability.

Duty of care is the moral and, in many cases, legal obligation of an employer to provide a reasonable standard of care towards its personnel, and to mitigate, or otherwise address all foreseeable risks that may harm or injure its employees, those acting on its behalf, or for whom it has a level of responsibility. Legal obligations will vary according to the jurisdiction of existing legislation and duty of care is not limited to contractual relations such as those between an employer and employee. The degree of responsibility an organisation has towards an individual can also be determined by the extent to which the organisation controls the working environment or activities. Duty of care obligations often extend to those acting on behalf of the organisation, including staff, volunteers, consultants, visitors, dependents, and in some cases affected populations.


Definition adapted from GISF's publications 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs' and 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations'.



Switzerland
GISF contributes to discussions on duty of care as part of AidEx, a humanitarian aid and disaster relief event.

E

Enterprise risk management (ERM)


 **Related term:**
security risk management (SRM).

The process of identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring an array of risks across an organisation that could impact its objectives, operations, and stakeholders.

Enterprise risk management (ERM) takes a more holistic approach to risk management, looking at risk strategically from the perspective of the entire organisation.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide Security Risk Management (SRM) Strategy and Policy Development: A Cross-Functional Guide.

Ethnicity

 **Related terms:**
nationality, 'race', racism.

A term that ascribes individuals to a certain group that share elements including a language, religion, tribe, history, but also a culture and an ancestral territory.

It is important to remember that the criteria included in 'ethnicity' can vary and that the boundaries between ethnic groups can be blurred.

Definition adapted from GISF's article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.

Evacuation

Related terms: casualty evacuation, medical evacuation, relocation, suspension.

Withdrawing staff for security reasons to a place of safety across the international borders of the country, or in the case of non-nationals to their home country.

For many organisations, moving staff to another location within the country is referred to as 'relocation'.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security & Safety Training Pack.

Exclusion

Related terms: diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); inclusion.

Practices or policies that result in certain individuals and groups being unfairly left out or denied access to opportunities, resources, or participation within an organisation.

Explosive

Related terms: explosive remnants of war (ERW), unexploded ordnance (UXO).

A substance that can be made to burst violently.

Examples include aerial bombs, cluster bombs, hand grenades, improvised explosive devices (IED), mines, surface-launched explosives, suicide vests, and vehicle borne devices.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Explosive remnants of war (ERW)

Related terms: abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO), explosive, improvised device (IED), unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO) left behind after an armed conflict.

ERW include unexploded bombs, shells, grenades, landmines, and other explosive devices.



Yemen

Explosive remnants of war (ERW) are cleared by explosive ordnance disposal experts.

Expulsion

 **Related term:**
forced closure.

The action or process of forcing and/or removing an individual or organisation from a location (also referred to as deportation).

Expulsions are often formal and enforced by an authority.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Extortion

 **Related term:**
bribery.

The use of coercion, intimidation, or threats against an individual or organisation to compel them to do something (also referred to as blackmail).

Often used to obtain money, property, or patronage.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Extrajudicial killing

The unlawful and deliberate killing of individuals by government authorities or other actors without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process.

Such arbitrary deprivations of life, which can also be carried out by militias, death squads or other non-State actors, often target political opponents, activists, or marginalized groups.

Definition adapted from OMCT – SOS-Torture Network.



F


Family liaison officer (FLO)

A member of staff who has been selected and trained to be the channel for support to family members following a critical incident.

They provide two-way communication between the family and the organisation.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Family First: Liaison and support during a crisis'.

First aid

 **Related term:** psychological first aid.

Provision of immediate assistance to an ill, injured or emotionally distressed person until professional help arrives.

First aid is concerned not only with resuscitation and physical illness or injury but also with other initial care, including psychological first aid (addressing the emotional and social needs of individuals). First aid interventions seek to preserve life, alleviate suffering, recognise risky contexts, prevent further illness or injury, and promote recovery.


Definition adapted from The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Forced closure

An order by a government or other authorities to halt operations in a country or territory.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Fraud

 **Related terms:** bribery, extortion.

Wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.

This includes a wide range of activities such as embezzlement, identity theft, bribery, forgery, and cyber fraud.



G

Gender

Gender refers to an individual's personal and social identity as a man, woman, or non-binary person.

The social differences between genders are deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. Gender, along with class and 'race', often determines the roles, power, and resources for individuals in society.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Gender and Security: Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in security risk management'.

Vanuatu

Sophie received support as part of a gender-focused project which helped women business owners to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic.



Gender analysis

 **Related term:**
gender.

Examination of the relationships between different genders and their access to and control of resources, their roles, and the constraints they face relative to each other.

A gender analysis should be integrated into the humanitarian needs assessment and in all sector assessments or situational analyses to ensure that gender-based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by humanitarian interventions and that where possible greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Gender and Security: Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in security risk management'.

Gender-based violence


 **Related terms:**
gender.

Harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.

Gender-based violence can include sexual, physical, mental, and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion, and manipulation. This can take many forms such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour crimes'.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Gender and Security: Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in security risk management'.

Gender mainstreaming

 **Related terms:**
gender, gender analysis.

The strategic assessment and inclusion of gender-specific considerations as an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of security policies, guidelines, and procedures, as well as incorporating these considerations in the safe implementation of programmes in the existing operational context.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Gender and Security: Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in security risk management'.

Governance

Structures and processes within an organisation that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation.

Security risk management (SRM) governance can take the form of Security Plan or Risk Assessment audits, competency assessments, tabletop exercises, or all staff security conversations etc.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

Government monitoring

 **Related term:** surveillance.

Host/donor governments actively engaging in overt or covert observation of organisations' activities, reports, and communications.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Risk Management Toolkit: Digital Security.



South Sudan
Women and girls take part in a programme to protect them from gender-based violence.

H


Harassment

 **Related term:** abuse.

An act of continued unwanted actions, directed at a person, which causes distress or discomfort.

This can include sexual harassment, bullying, racial harassment, and other forms of discriminatory behaviour.

Hate speech

 **Related terms:** disinformation, malinformation, misinformation.

All forms of expression (text, images, audio, video) that spread, incite, promote, or justify hatred and violence based on intolerance, usually against identity traits (gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.).

Hate speech can contain a mix of misinformation, disinformation, and rumours that are exploited by the perpetrators.

Hazard

A process, phenomenon (natural), or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury, or other health impacts, property damage, social, and economic disruption, or environmental degradation.

Hazards can include natural disasters, environmental degradation, fires, and road traffic collisions.

Definition adapted from United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

Health facility


Any facility that provides medical services to patients.

Examples include clinics, hospitals, laboratories, makeshift hospitals, medical education facilities, mobile clinics, pharmacies, or medical warehouses.

Definition adapted from Insecurity Insight: Definitions and Methodologies.



Hibernation

 **Related term:** suspension.

Temporarily having staff remain at the office, home, or other safe locations to avoid an emerging threat, or until conditions improve (also referred to as sheltering in place).

Hibernation could be a preparatory phase to the relocation or evacuation of staff or it could also be used when the situation is expected to stabilise within a short period.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security & Safety Training Pack.

Holding statement

An initial statement released to the media once a critical incident has occurred or has been picked up by the media, to avoid speculation and distortion of facts.

A holding statement acknowledges the situation but makes no comments about how you intend to respond or the actions you will take.


Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Managing the Message: Communication and media management in a security crisis'.

Host country or government

The country or government where staff are located, or where activities take place.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Hostage

 **Related terms:**
abduction,
kidnapping.

Hostage-taker(s)

A person who is being held against their will and whose subsequent release is dependent on the fulfilment of certain conditions.


Definition adapted from GISF's guide on
Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

An individual or group that abducts or holds captive individuals until their demands are met. Alternative terms include kidnappers and abductors.

The term 'hostage-taker' is a common term used in all types of abduction and kidnapping situations, even if the terminology is not strictly correct.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on
Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Hostile environment awareness training (HEAT)

 **Related term:**
security training.

A scenario-based personal security training designed for staff working in high-risk environments (also referred to as hostile environment and first-aid training, HEFAT). HEAT or HEFAT are common terms used to describe a wide range of simulation-based security training, however different training providers may use different titles.

Centre for Safety & Development (CSD)




Kenya

Participants take part in a [hostile environment awareness training \(HEAT\)](#) course organised by the Centre for Safety & Development (CSD).

Humanitarian access

 **Related term:** humanitarian negotiation.

Humanitarian negotiation

 **Related term:** humanitarian access.

The ability of humanitarian actors to reach affected populations, as well as affected population's ability to access assistance and services.

Definition adapted from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The interaction between humanitarian organisations and their counterparts to establish and maintain their presence in crisis environments (e.g., conflicts, disasters, migration flows, epidemics), ensuring humanitarian access to people in need, and facilitating the delivery of assistance and the implementation of protection activities.

To achieve this, organisations must negotiate and build trust at different levels and may involve both state and non-state actors. Negotiation occurs at a higher level, involving heads of state, ministers, army generals, governors, but also at a lower level, with soldiers at a checkpoint, leaders of local militias, town elders, religious leaders, heads of families, and even the very people organisations are trying to support.

Definition adapted from Frontline Negotiations.

Humanitarian tele-communication

The use of communications technologies for the purposes of saving lives, alleviating suffering, and protecting the dignity of crisis-affected populations.

This includes technical capacity building, information collection and dissemination, preparedness activities, and/or data analysis.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Communications Technology and Humanitarian Delivery: Challenges and opportunities for security risk management'.




Imprisonment

 **Related terms:**
arrest, detention.

The holding of a staff member in a known official or unknown location, such as a prison, often following formal charges.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Improvised explosive device (IED)


 **Related terms:**
explosive, explosive remnants of war (ERW), unexploded ordnance (UXO).

A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic, or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, incapacitate, harass, or distract.

It may incorporate military stores but is normally devised from non-military components.

Definition adapted from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

Incident


 **Related terms:**
accident, safety, security.

An adverse security event which results in, or could result in, harm to staff, disruption to programmes and activities, or loss or damage to the organisation's assets or its reputation.

A security incident is one that arises as a result of intentional harm.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Incident analysis


 **Related term:** security incident information management.

The systematic examination of incidents (such as security breaches, safety accidents, or other disruptive events) to understand their causes, impacts, and implications.

The goal of incident analysis is to identify weaknesses in security measures, improve response strategies, and prevent future incidents.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


Incident management team (IMT)

 **Related terms:** critical incident, crisis management team (CMT), decision-making authority (DMA).

A group formed specifically to manage a critical incident, usually located in the country, or close to where the incident occurred, or is occurring.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication on 'Crisis Management of Critical Incidents'.

Incident mapping

 **Related terms:** incident, incident analysis.

An activity to understand where security incidents occur by visualising, usually on a map, and comparing locations with other factors to determine patterns and identify high-risk areas and high-risk times.

Incident report

 **Related term:** incident.


An account of events sent after a security incident that provides details on the situation that has occurred, and the actions taken.

There are typically three types of incident reports:

- Immediate incident report (sent immediately or as soon as possible after the incident occurs and often verbal).
- Incident updates (sent as often as necessary, to provide more information on the incident or situation as it evolves).
- Post-incident report (completed and sent after the situation is stabilised or the incident is over, providing a written account of the incident and actions taken).


Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Toolbox.

Incident response

 **Related terms:** incident, incident analysis, incident mapping.

Actions taken by an organisation following a suspected or actual security incident to manage the consequences of the incident and prevent its future recurrence.

Inclusion

 **Related terms:** diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); exclusion.

The process of creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics, feel valued, respected, and have equal access to opportunities and resources.

Inclusive security

Related term: inclusion.

An approach to security that recognises the impact of an individual's specific profile on the risks they face, and actively provides them with the guidance and support they need to enable them to fully participate and feel secure.

Definition adapted from the GISF article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.

Information security

Related terms: cyber security, digital security.

Refers to the practice of protecting information from unauthorised access, disclosure, disruption, modification, or destruction.

This involves implementing policies, procedures, and technical measures to safeguard the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

OCHA/Marc Belanger

El Salvador
Humanitarian organisations often hold sensitive data from the individuals and communities they serve. This means good information security is vital.



Informed consent

The process by which staff give their agreement or permission based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the risks, implications, and future consequences of an action or decision.

Informed consent is central to duty of care; it is vital that staff can discuss concerns and say 'no' to a role, trip, or situation that they feel compromises their safety or security.

Insecure context

An environment where the ability to operate is impacted by a lack of security.

Different organisations will create their own classifications of levels of insecure contexts based on their individual risk management processes (e.g., low, medium, high, extreme).

Amnesty International



Ukraine
Active areas of conflict are often defined as insecure contexts due to the difficulty of operating safely in these environments.

Intersectionality

 **Related term:**
inclusive security.

An analytical framework used to understand and explore how the different parts of one individual's identity ('race', gender, wealth, sexual orientation, religion etc.) influence their experience of the world.

An individual's intersectional identity impacts how they are perceived, the vulnerabilities they have, and the risks they may face.

Adopting an intersectional lens is, therefore, an essential part of security risk management (SRM) and forms the foundation of a person-centred approach.

Definition adapted from the GISF article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.

Intrusion


 **Related term:**
burglary.

Wrongful or unauthorised entry, usually with force, into a premise or vehicle.

Intrusion differs from burglary or break-ins in that perpetrators are often more overt or less concerned about being discovered.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Investigation


 **Related terms:**
confidentiality,
disclosure.

The process of gathering information and examining facts to determine whether an allegation of wrongdoing by staff or the organisation occurred, and if so, the persons or entities accountable.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

K

Kidnapping

 **Related terms:** abduction, hostage, hostage-taker.

The forcible capture and detention of one or more persons at an unknown location against their will until a demand for ransom or other concession is met.

Other forms of kidnapping include:

- express kidnaps (the short abduction of an individual with the intent of forcing the hostage to withdraw money from ATMs).
- tiger kidnaps (hostages are taken with a demand directed at a targeted victim who is then forced to participate in a crime).

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

L

Law enforcement

The government departments and agencies that enforce laws, investigate crimes, and make arrests.

Non-state actors who act as a de-facto government may also enforce laws.

Liability

 **Related term:**
duty of care.

The state of being legally or morally accountable for a specific action or outcome.

Liability is often associated with duty of care.

Looting

 **Related term:**
theft.

Theft that occurs during periods of civil unrest, mob violence, riots, or other upheavals.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Loss event


 **Related term:**
incident.

An occurrence that produces a financial loss or negative impact on assets.

Examples include security incidents, crimes, war, natural hazards, or disasters.

M

Malinformation

 **Related terms:** disinformation, hate speech, misinformation.

Information that is based on truth but is deliberately exaggerated in order to mislead or cause harm.


Definition adapted from Frontline Negotiations – How to manage misinformation.

Marginalisation

 **Related term:** exclusion.

A process and state of social exclusion that prevents individuals or groups from participating fully in social, economic, and political life and from asserting their rights. This exclusion can be structural, visible, or invisible, intentional, or unintentional. This should be considered when adopting a person-centred approach to security.

Medical evacuation (MEDEVAC)

 **Related terms:** casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), evacuation.

Medical evacuation refers to the movement of a sick/injured person by specialist medical transport (ambulance or air ambulance) with trained medical staff on-board so that care can be administered on route.

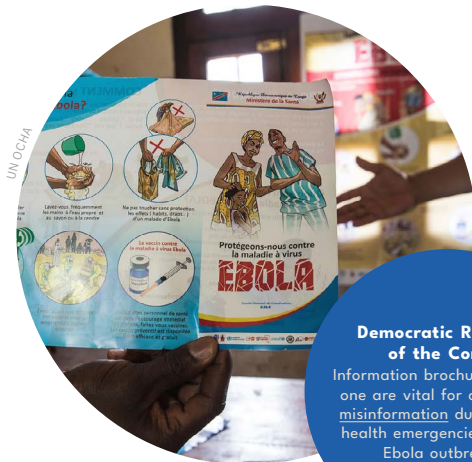
Medical evacuations are often used to transfer a person between medical facilities, either within the country or internationally.

Misinformation

🔗 **Related terms:** disinformation, hate speech, malinformation.

Misleading, inaccurate, or completely false information that is communicated without the explicit intent to deceive or cause harm.

Definition adapted from Frontline Negotiations – How to manage misinformation.



Democratic Republic of the Congo

Information brochures like this one are vital for combatting misinformation during public health emergencies, such as Ebola outbreaks.

Missing

🔗 **Related terms:** detention, kidnapping.

An incident in which a staff member has disappeared.

In this instance, no information is available, and no contact is made.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Mitigation measures

🔗 **Related terms:** risk mitigation, security strategies.

Various measures and actions taken to reduce the likelihood or impact of specific risks to an acceptable level.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Mutiny

🔗 **Related terms:** armed rebellion

A revolt or rebellion against an authority, particularly within a military, naval, or organised group.

N

Nationality

The state of being a citizen or subject of a particular country.

Nationality can influence the security measures that apply to staff, often differentiating between staff who are citizens of the country of operation and non-nationals.

Definition adapted from GISF's article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.

Natural disaster

A naturally occurring physical phenomena that seriously disrupts the functioning of a community and that exceeds its capacity to cope using its own resources.

Natural disasters may include earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, damage producing storms (hail, flash floods, etc.), floods, tsunamis, etc.

Near miss

An event that could have resulted in harm, damage or loss to the organisation, its staff, assets, programmes, or reputation, or had the potential to result in more serious impacts (also referred to as near hit or close call).

Near miss incidents must also be reported and investigated as they may prevent others from being involved and help to understand how the security context is changing.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


Non-state armed group (NSAG)

Any organised armed group with a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political or ideological objectives. Alternative terms include armed opposition group (AOG), armed groups and de facto authorities (AGDA), armed non-state actors (ANSA), or organised armed groups.

NSAG is a broad category for groups with varying goals, structures, doctrines, funding sources, military capacity, and degree of territorial control.

Definition adapted from the article 'Armed Groups and de facto Authorities (AGDA): Geneva Call adapts its engagement terminology'.

Nuclear weapon

 **Related terms:** biological weapon, chemical weapon, radiological weapon.

A device that uses a nuclear reaction to create an explosion that is much more powerful than that of conventional explosives.






Occupation

 **Related term:**
intrusion.

The seizure and takeover of any building, warehouse, compound, or area.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Office closure

 **Related term:**
suspension.

The decision to shut down an office in response to specific events or the operating environment.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Open-source intelligence (OSINT)

 **Related term:**
public information.

The collection, analysis and interpretation of information from publicly available sources to produce actionable insights or intelligence reports.

P

Partnership

Any formalised (contractual) relationship between two or more organisations. Partnerships can vary in form, length, scope, and degree of collaboration, and are often between international and local/national partners in the humanitarian sector.

It is important to note that the term may sometimes be loosely used to describe a non-contractual relationship for civil society work, e.g. campaigns and advocacy.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations'.

Persona non grata

 **Related term:** expulsion.

An unwelcome or unacceptable person or organisation.

Individuals or organisations with this designation may be denied access to facilities, events, or locations and areas of operation.

Personal data

 **Related term:** information security.

Any data that directly or indirectly identifies or can be used to identify a living individual (alternative term: personally identifiable information).

This could be data on community members, staff, or volunteers.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Communications Technology and Humanitarian Delivery: Challenges and opportunities for security risk management'.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Equipment used to prevent or minimise exposure to threats and hazards.

PPE is commonly associated with ballistic protection such as body armour or helmets. It can also refer to equipment to protect against many other threats/hazards e.g. biological or chemical hazards.

Definition adapted from the World Health Organization.



Japan

Search and rescue workers wear personal protective equipment (PPE) while looking for survivors after a tsunami.

Personal security

 **Related terms:** security.

An individual's freedom from risk or harm resulting from intentional acts of violence through awareness and abilities to assess and respond to threats.

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Safety and Security Training Project.

Personnel

Staff, volunteers, and any other individuals (including consultants, partners, visitors, etc) who fall under the organisation's legal and moral responsibility.

There is a contractual relationship, remunerated or not, between an organisation and its personnel, which results in duty of care obligations to those individuals.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Physical security

 **Related term:** security.

Physical security describes security measures that are designed to deny unauthorised access to facilities, equipment, and resources and to protect personnel and property from damage or harm.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Piracy

 **Related term:** theft.


Preparedness

Piracy is an act of robbery or criminal violence by ship or boat-borne attackers upon another ship or a coastal area, typically with the goal of stealing cargo and other valuable goods.

Building organisational capacities needed to efficiently manage all types of security incidents (also referred to as readiness).

Definition adapted from United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

Private military companies (PMCs)


 **Related terms:** private security contracting, private security providers (PSPs).

Private business entities that provide military and/or security services and have access to greater military resources than private security providers (PSPs).

Their services include conducting both offensive, and defensive operations.

Definition adapted from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).


Private security contracting

 **Related terms:** private military companies (PMCs), private security providers (PSPs).

The practice whereby an organisation outsources certain functions to a private security provider.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Private security contracting in the humanitarian sector: time to take responsibility'.

Private security providers (PSPs)

 **Related terms:** private security contracting, private military companies (PMCs).


Any company whose business activities include the provision of security services either on its own behalf or on behalf of another, irrespective of how such company describes itself. Alternative terms include private security companies (PSCs) or private security contractors.

Security services include armed guarding and protection of persons and objects, such as convoys, buildings and other places; maintenance and operation of weapons systems; prisoner detention; and advice to or training of local forces and security personnel.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication on 'Private security contracting in the humanitarian sector: time to take responsibility'.



Programme criticality


 **Related terms:** risk acceptance, risk attitude, risk assessment, risk level.

A framework used for decision-making on acceptable risk, that ensures that the impact and needs of programmes and activities are balanced with the security risks.

Programme criticality is assessed on four levels, with PC4 equating to a low level of acceptable risk and PC1 at a very high level of acceptable risk.

Definition adapted definition from UN Programme Criticality.

Proof of life (POL)


 **Related terms:** abduction, hostage, kidnapping, proof of possession.

Information that confirms a hostage is alive at a given time and serves also to verify the authenticity of hostage-takers or communication channels.

Proof of life may involve recorded statements or answers to specific pre-identified questions that help verify that the hostage was alive at time that response was obtained.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Proof of possession (POP)

 **Related terms:** abduction, hostage, kidnapping, proof of life.

Evidence provided by the hostage-taker, which makes clear that they have the hostage in their possession but is not sufficient to constitute proof of life.


Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Property damage

Any damage or harm that is done to an organisation's property, either unintentionally (e.g., natural disasters, accidents) or intentionally (e.g., riots that cause property damage, arson).

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Protection strategy

 **Related terms:** acceptance strategy, deterrence strategy.

A security approach that seeks to reduce staff exposure to certain threats through the implementation of security mechanisms and procedures.

It includes security procedures and plans as well as physical security measures, communication equipment, having reliable vehicles, building perimeter walls and setting up alarm systems, safe rooms, and emergency supplies. Protection approaches also involve security briefings and training, and different modes of operation such as low visibility, remote management and collaborating with other organisations on security initiatives.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.


Protocols

 **Related term:** control.

A set of specific and comprehensive procedures developed by an organisation to explain the correct conduct or approaches to be followed in specific situations.

These are typically drawn from the security risk management process.

Psychological first aid


 **Related terms:** aftercare, first aid.

A set of skills and knowledge that can be used to assist people who are in distress, to help them to feel calm and able to cope in a difficult situation.

Psychological first aid (PFA) involves paying attention to their reactions, active listening, giving practical help, and supporting them to obtain additional assistance.

Definition adapted from 'A Short Introduction to Psychological First Aid' from The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Public information

 **Related term:** open-source intelligence (OSINT).

Any information that can be disclosed or disseminated through the news, media, and other channels and does not pose any risk to the organisation or its staff (also referred to as open-source information).

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.




Switzerland

Through its resources and outreach, GISF provides guidance and templates to help NGOs establish the best protocols for their security risk management.

R

'Race'

 **Related terms:** discrimination, ethnicity, nationality.

A social construct that seeks to divide humans into racial categories. These categories do not reflect any biological or scientific realities but are based on certain physical characteristics (i.e. skin colour, facial features).

The concepts of 'race' (including the terms 'white', 'brown', 'black'), ethnicity, and nationality and many others are socially constructed. Because the term 'race' is controversial in some languages, and many are unaware that the term does not reflect any biological reality, quotation marks are used to emphasise the artificial nature of this concept.

Definition adapted from GISF's article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.

Racism


 **Related term:** 'race'.

Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different 'race' based on the belief that one's own 'race' is superior.


Racism is founded on a historical power relationship and includes certain ideologies about 'races'. It is operationalised through forms and practices of discrimination.

Definition adapted from GISF's article 'Towards Inclusive Security: the impact of 'race', ethnicity and nationality on aid workers' security'.


Radiological weapon

 **Related terms:** biological weapon, chemical weapon, nuclear weapon.


Ransom

 **Related term:** kidnapping.

Rape

 **Related terms:** sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual violence.

Relocation

 **Related terms:** evacuation, hibernation, suspension.

A weapon that disperses radioactive agents to inflict injury, or cause contamination or damage (also referred to as 'dirty bombs').

Definition adapted International Risk Management Institute, Inc (IRMI).

Money, goods, or services demanded or paid in exchange for the safe release of hostages.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

A type of sexual assault involving penetration (oral, vaginal, or anal penetration) carried out against a person without their consent.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Withdrawing staff and assets to a safer area within the country, until the situation stabilises.

For many organisations, moving of staff across the international borders of a country is referred to as 'evacuation'.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

Remote management

 **Related term:** hibernation.

Managing a team and programme activities from another location, in some cases another country (also referred to as remote operations).

Remote management can be considered a security strategy where an adaptation is required due to insecurity. This could include the withdrawal of at-risk staff, and the transfer of programme responsibilities to others.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Management and Capacity Development: International agencies working with local partners'.

Remote threat

 **Related term:** cyber attack.

Events in which the organisation or a staff member receives a threat delivered by some remote mechanism, not face-to-face (e.g. email, SMS, phone, or general threats issued on a website, or social media).

Includes direct threats issued during protests and demonstrations.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


Reputational risk

 **Related term:** risk.

Events resulting in a perceived or actual, or potential risk to the organisation's good standing, image, or reputation.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Residual risk


 **Related terms:** risk acceptance, risk mitigation.

The level of risk remaining after all appropriate risk-reduction and mitigation measures are taken.

Regardless of the various mitigation measures implemented, some level of risk will remain: 'residual risk'. Residual risk should be determined to assist decisions on the acceptability of the risk and ultimately whether activities should be conducted or continue.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Management and Capacity Development: International agencies working with local partners'.

Resilience

 **Related terms:** business continuity, contingency plans, programme criticality.

The ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions.

This can be on an individual, team, or organisation level.

Definition adapted from Resilience: A Risk Management Approach, ODI.

Response consultant

An external advisor specialising in high-risk incidents who can support organisations in developing and implementing an effective response strategy.

For example, a response consultant can provide advice and support in the management of incidents such as abduction, kidnapping, detention, cyber exploitation, etc.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Restricted travel

 **Related term:** hibernation.

Any limitations placed on the movement of an organisation's staff in a particular area or country (also referred to as a travel ban).

This type of event may be the result of insecurity, political or social unrest, outbreaks of disease, or natural disasters.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Risk


 **Related term:** risk management.

The effect of uncertainty on the achievement of specific objectives.

Risk is the product of potential threats on the organisation, its staff, assets, reputation, or programmes, within the operating environment, and the level of exposure, or vulnerability, to them.

Definition adapted from ISO31000.

Risk acceptance

 **Related terms:** programme criticality, risk attitude, risk capacity, risk threshold.

The level of risk an organisation, group, or individual wants to take to achieve specific objective

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations'.

Risk attitude

The amount or type of risk that an organisation is prepared to seek, accept or tolerate.

Risk capacity

 **Related term:** risk threshold.

An objective assessment of the risk levels the organisation can sustain given its operational footprint and resources, and its risk management capabilities and expertise.

Risk level

 **Related term:** risk.

Degree of potential impact and likelihood of a threat or hazard affecting personnel and/or an organisation's operations.


The risk level is derived using a table which for example may be through the application of a four-step sliding scale (low, moderate, high, extreme). The risk level is calculated using likelihood and consequence criteria after considering the existing control environment.

Definition adapted from GISF's risk assessment tool.

Risk matrix


A tool for visualising and prioritising risk. Multiple threats/hazards are plotted on a table based on their likelihood and consequence.

Risk mitigation

 **Related terms:** control, security risk management (SRM).

Action taken to reduce the likelihood of a risk being realised or the impact of the risk. Alternative terms include risk reduction and risk controls.


Risk owner

 **Related terms:** accountability, security risk management (SRM).

The person or entity with the accountability and authority to manage a specific risk.

Definition adapted from ISO31000.

Risk register

 **Related terms:** risk assessment, risk level, risk matrix, security risk management (SRM).

A record or repository of potential risks identified that could affect the organisation and its operations.

Definition adapted from Humanitarian Outcomes' Risk Register Tool.

Risk sharing

 **Related term:** risk transfer.

Sharing responsibility equitably between organisations as part of a partnership for the risks that affect them both.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: a joint action guide for local and international aid organisations'.


Risk (attitude) statement

A brief explanation of how security risk management (SRM) risks relate to, and may impact, the overall strategy of the organisation, based on its mission, aims, objectives and operational context. It specifies what there is zero attitude for, what there is a cautious attitude for, and why in some circumstances there could be a higher level of risk attitude.

Establishing an organisational risk attitude statement specific to SRM can allow for more meaningful assessments of the risks that are relevant to achieving organisational aims. Without the framing provided by your risk attitude, it is harder for SRM teams to drive through actions when needed.

Definition adapted from GISF's guide Security Risk Management (SRM) Strategy and Policy Development: A Cross-Functional Guide.

Risk threshold

 **Related terms:** programme criticality, risk acceptance, risk attitude, risk capacity, risk threshold.

The limit above which the risks are too onerous for an organisation, but below which risks are acceptable as supported by the organisation's risk attitude.


Definition adapted from GISF's Risk Thresholds in Humanitarian Assistance.

Risk tolerance

The acceptable level of variations in the organisation's risk attitude/appetite, based on specific circumstances.

| Definition adapted from ISO31000.

Risk transfer

 **Related term:** risk sharing.

The intentional or unintentional creation, transformation, or shifting of risks (either increasing or decreasing in severity) for one actor due to the presence or action of another.

For example, when international organisations work with local organisations security risks are frequently transferred to the local/national organisation.

| Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective'.

Robbery


 **Related terms:** burglary, theft.

Taking property unlawfully from a person or place by force or threat of force.

If a robbery involves the use of weapons, it is considered an armed robbery.

S

Safeguarding


 **Related terms:**
abuse of power, 'do no harm'.

The responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and adults at risk and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation.

This term covers physical, emotional, and sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse by staff and associated personnel, as well as safeguarding risks caused by programme design and implementation. Many organisations now also use this term to cover harm caused to staff in the workplace.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Safeguarding policy

 **Related terms:**
abuse, safeguarding.

A document outlining the standard of behaviour expected of the organisation's staff and representatives, and which specifically prohibits sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.

The policy should reflect where possible the organisation's values and how these are intended to create safe, equitable and inclusive organisations. The policy should be victim/survivor-focused (i.e., the victim/survivor's wishes, safety, and well-being remain a priority in all matters and procedures).

Safety

 **Related term:**
accident.

Saving Lives Together (SLT)



Freedom from risk or harm resulting from unintentional or accidental acts, events, or hazards.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.


An initiative created to strengthen security collaboration between the UN Security Management System (UNSMS), INGOs and other international organisations.

The SLT framework for improving UN-NGO security collaboration in humanitarian operations includes:

- establishing security coordination arrangements and forums.
- sharing relevant security information.
- cooperating on security training.
- cooperating on operational and logistics arrangements, where feasible.
- identifying resource requirements for enhancing security coordination between the UN, INGOs and IOs, and advocate for funding.
- consulting on common ground rules for humanitarian action.

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Collaboration Guide.

Scenario-based planning

 **Related terms:**
contingency plans, crisis management exercise.

Security

 **Related terms:**
safety.

Security audit

Developing predictive scenarios (often focussed on best-case, worst-case, and most likely), in order to assess how operational conditions and risks may be impacted, and to anticipate any changes to current practices that need to be made in preparation for these scenarios.

Definition adapted from GISF's SRM Toolkit: Assessments.

Freedom from risk or harm resulting from intentional acts of violence, aggression and/ or criminal acts against an organisation's staff, programmes, or assets.


Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

An internal or external evidence-based review which assesses the effectiveness of the security risk management framework in enabling the delivery of the organisation's objectives, its implementation, and whether the organisation is meeting its duty of care responsibilities to staff.

There are two types of security risk management audits:

- Organisational audits that review the security risk management arrangements across the whole organisation.

Security collaboration

 **Related term:** Saving Lives Together (SLT).

Security culture

- Country/location audits that review the security risk management approach and systems in a specific country or area.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Organisations acting together to address common concerns regarding security and access, share information on incidents and risks within the operating environment, and strengthen their collective capacity to minimise risks to their staff, assets, programmes, and reputation.

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Collaboration Guide.

A system of shared assumptions, values and beliefs that govern how people behave in organisations with specific regard to security. It is an organisation's understanding of 'the way we do things around here' in regard to security risk management.


Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Security focal point (SFP)

A staff member with some responsibility for safety and security (also referred to as a Security & Safety Focal Point, SSFP).

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Management and Capacity Development: International agencies working with local partners'.

Security incident information management

 **Related terms:** incident, information security.

The collection, reporting, recording, analysis, sharing and use of information (including data) linked to a security incident with the overarching aim of obtaining unhindered access for the delivery of aid by improving organisational security risk management.


Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Security levels

A system used to categorise and communicate the level of risk to staff in a specific context or location and to guide security management decisions, actions and measures required in response to increasing insecurity (also referred to as security phases).

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Security measures

 **Related terms:** protocols, standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Security plan

Actions taken by organisations in response to specific security risks.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Country-level or location specific documents that outline the measures and procedures in place to manage security, and the responsibilities and resources required to implement them.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Security policy

A global document that provides a clear statement of the organisation's approach to security and safety risks, the key principles underpinning this approach, and the roles and responsibilities all staff members have in managing these risks.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Security risk

 **Related term:** risk.

Physical or psychological harm resulting from intentional acts of violence, aggression and/or criminal acts.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective'.

Security risk assessment


A process through which organisations identify the different security and safety threats that could affect their staff, assets, programmes, and reputation, and analyse them according to their likelihood and impact to determine the degree of risk involved.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Partnerships and Security Risk Management: from the local partner's perspective'.

Security risk management (SRM)

A structured process for identifying, analysing, evaluating, and managing security risks that affect an organisation's staff, assets, and programmes.

Security risk management framework

 **Related term:** security policy, security risk management (SRM).

A set of policies, protocols, plans, mechanisms, and responsibilities that supports the reduction of security risks to staff.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Security strategy

Related terms: acceptance strategy, deterrence strategy, protection strategy.

An organisation's approach to managing security depending on the operating environment and the risks that exist within that location.

Within security risk management, security strategies are often associated with acceptance, protection and/or deterrence strategies.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.

Sensitive information

Related terms: data destruction, personal data.

Information which, if compromised through alteration, corruption, loss, misuse, or unauthorised disclosure, could cause serious harm to the organisation owning it, its staff, assets, programmes, reputation, partners, and communities.

The use and storage of sensitive information should be covered by a policy on information management and may be the subject of legislation.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Managing the Message: Communication and media management in a security crisis'.

Sexual abuse

Related terms: abuse, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation.

Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It includes sexual assault as well as rape.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Sexual assault

Related terms: rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation.

Act of sexual contact on the body of another person without their consent.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Sexual exploitation

Related term: sexual abuse.

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, unequal power, or trust, for sexual purposes. This includes profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

This is managed through safeguarding standards and practices that prevent Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH), or Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA).

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Sexual harassment

Related terms: sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual exploitation.

A continuum of unacceptable and unwelcome behaviours and practices of a sexual nature that may include, but are not limited to, sexual suggestions or demands, requests for sexual favours and sexual, verbal, or physical conduct or gestures, that are or might reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating.

Sexual harassment is commonly associated with the workplace but extends to include any unacceptable behaviour towards affected populations in any context.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Sexual violence

Related terms: rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault.

Any kind of sexual activity or act that is unwanted or happens without consent.

Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse, forced abortion, and sharing of inappropriate images or videos.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Shooting

Related term: armed activity.

An incident involving the discharge of firearms or other weapons, posing a threat to the safety and security of individuals and property (also referred to as gunfire).

Site security

Related term: physical security.

Strategies and measures implemented to protect a specific location or facility from threats such as unauthorised access, vandalism, theft, and other breaches.

This usually focusses on all locations where an organisation has a significant presence, including where staff regularly visit or work (e.g. guesthouses, office).

Definition adapted from GISF's NGO Security Toolbox.

Small arms fire

Use of small firearms that are portable and designed for individual use.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Social engineering

Related term: cyber exploitation.

The psychological manipulation of people to obtain confidential information, access, or control.

Techniques may involve luring users into exposing data, spreading malware, or giving access to restricted systems.



Cameroon

"We had been married for only ten months when they killed my husband," says Abiguel in the aftermath of a [shooting](#) in her community.

Staff misconduct mechanism

A workplace or community-based mechanism for reporting incidents, sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud, corruption, and other misconduct issues.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Standard operating procedures (SOPs)

A set of step-by-step instructions compiled to assist staff in undertaking routine operations or dealing with situations in order to prevent incidents, and how to respond should problems arise.

Related terms: contingency plan, protocol, security plan.

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are an essential component of security plans.

Stress

Related terms: psychological first aid.

An emotional, cognitive, physical, or behavioural reaction to everyday pressures. Prolonged or sudden intense exposure to stress factors can result in exhaustion ('burnout') or traumatic stress.

Surveillance

Related terms: government monitoring.

The close monitoring of individuals, vehicles, and property in order to observe behaviour or obtain information.

Survivor

Any individual who has experienced or been targeted by abuse, violence, exploitation, or neglect.

The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are often used interchangeably. 'Victim' is often used in legal and medical sectors. 'Survivor' is the generally preferred term as it implies resilience.

Definition adapted from Bond UK's 'Safeguarding definitions and reporting mechanisms for UK NGOs'.

Suspension

Related terms: contingency plans, forced closure.

Temporarily ceasing activities due to a perceived or emerging threat, or to allow time to assess the situation, or as a result of instruction by authorities.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security to go: a risk management toolkit for humanitarian aid agencies'.

Nigeria

An aid delivery resumes after a suspension of humanitarian operations following an attack on aid workers and facilities.



T

Target

 **Related term:**
attack.

A person, object, or place selected as the focus of an attack or the subject of criminal activity.


Target settlement figure

 **Related term:**
ransom.

The figure aimed to be agreed in a negotiation. Although this generally refers to a financial figure in response to ransom demands, it can also be used to refer to non-financial concessions, for example, the provision of services.


Definition adapted from GISF's guide on Abduction and Kidnap Risk Management.

Terrorism

 **Related term:** non-state armed groups (NSAG).

The unlawful use or threat of violent acts by individuals and/or groups in order to achieve political, religious, or ideological aims, and designed to coerce or intimidate governments or the public.

Theft

 **Related terms:**
burglary, looting, robbery.

Taking someone's property or services without their consent and where there is no use of force.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

Threat

 **Related term:** hazard.

A potential act that may result in harm or injury to staff, or loss of, or damage to an organisation's property or programmes.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security & Safety Training Pack.


Threat assessment

 **Related terms:** hazard, threat.

The practice of identifying and analysing the nature, origin, frequency, and geographical concentration of threats (also referred to as threat analysis).

Definition adapted from Good Practice Review 8: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments.


Threat of closure

 **Related term:** forced closure.

Events that could potentially prompt the forced closure to an activity, programme, or organisation.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.


Tolerance

 **Related term:** acceptance strategy.

As part of an acceptance strategy, tolerance reflects a level of acceptance achieved amongst different stakeholders for the organisation as part of a continuum, which ranges from targeted, rejected, tolerated, and ultimately accepted.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Achieving safe operations through acceptance'.

Torture

 **Related terms:** attack, beating.

The deliberate infliction of severe pain or suffering on a person for reasons such as punishment, extracting a confession, interrogation for information, or to intimidate other parties.

Trauma-informed response

A practice that recognises that traumatic experiences impact the way individuals respond and react and not to re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions (also referred to as trauma-informed care).

For example, instead of thinking a victim/survivor is disruptive or not interested in engaging in an investigation, acknowledge that they require understanding and support to deal with the impact of trauma.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Trigger

 **Related term:** contingency plan.

A particular event or situation that prompts a chain of events or specific actions.

U

Uncertainty

🔗 **Related term:**
risk.

The state, even partial, of deficiency of information related to, understanding or knowledge of an event, its consequence, or likelihood.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication on 'Risk Thresholds in Humanitarian Assistance'.

Unexploded ordnance (UXO)

🔗 **Related term:**
explosive remnants of war (ERW).

Any munitions, ranging from aircraft bombs to bullets, which have been discharged but have not exploded, or have not been discharged but still remain live.



Philippines

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) is recovered by a special explosive detection unit during a two-week clearance of villages affected by conflict.

V

Vandalism

Deliberate destruction of or damage to property.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.

UN/OCHA Ethiopia



Ethiopia

A hospital suffers from vandalism during conflict in the northeast of Ethiopia.

Victim

 **Related term:**
survivor.

A person who has been harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action.

The term 'victim' has protective implications, as it implies an injustice which requires redress. The term 'survivor' implies strength, resilience, and the capacity to survive. Individuals who have experienced abuse or harm may choose different terms to describe their experience.

Violence

The intentional use of physical force of power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

Vulnerability

The extent to which an organisation or individual is exposed to a specific threat, and their ability to cope or deal with an incident, should it occur.

Vulnerability is dynamic and an organisation/ individual can be more or less vulnerable depending on multiple factors.

Definition adapted from GISF's publication 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for small NGOs'.




Somalia

Aisha is an activist fighting to end violence against women.

W

Wellbeing

 **Related term:** threat.

The holistic state of physical, mental, social and emotional health and resilience of an individual or community affected by a crisis, with a focus on promoting dignity, safety and access to essential services and support.

Definition adapted from the UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Witness

 **Related term:** disclosure.

A person who sees an event happening, especially a crime or an accident. For example, an individual who observes an attack or crime against another staff member or community member.

Definition adapted from GISF's Security Incident Information Management Handbook.



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