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# AT WHAT COST?

## THE TRUE COST AND VALUE OF SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

Notes from GISF's Global Security  
Risk and Policy Conference

DUBLIN, IRELAND  
26-27 FEBRUARY 2025





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# ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

GISF held its inaugural Global Security Risk and Policy Conference in Dublin from 26-27 February 2025. The event was themed around resourcing and funding security risk management.

Ensuring secure and sustainable access to people in need is both costly and invaluable. Delivering a comprehensive approach to NGO security risk management – from staff safety to training and access – requires significant time and financial resources. In the face of increasing insecurity, higher costs, and shrinking budgets, resourcing security for NGOs is a considerable challenge. To address this, it's crucial not only to allocate resources effectively but also to clearly demonstrate the value of investing in security risk management.



GISF's Conference brought together:

- GISF members and associates
- United Nations agencies
- International agencies
- Donors
- Network/coordination platforms
- Universities and research institutions
- Think tanks and policy institutes.

Through a series of talks and panel discussions, attendees delved into the Conference theme. Together, we identified strategies for how to maximise available resources and make a stronger case for security risk management funding.

In this document, you will find summaries of each of the Conference sessions, as well as the recommendations that came out of the event. In addition to identifying short-term opportunities, we aimed to reach common positions to evolve the security risk management system.

The key recommendations are summarised at the end of this document under four themes:



Maximising government donor resources for security



Exploring alternative funding and financing solutions



Consolidating security resources and sharing services



Enhancing security resourcing for local and national partners

# KEYNOTE SPEECH



Senator Tom Clonan is a former army captain, journalist, and lecturer. He has spent his life championing dignity and justice, from peacekeeping missions in the Middle East to exposing systemic issues in the Irish Defence Forces. Elected to Seanad Éireann in 2022, he is a fully Independent Senator in Ireland.

Senator Clonan's keynote speech reflected on the turbulent moment the world is currently experiencing. He suggested that the "rules-based order" is under threat, with international humanitarian law being violated in conflicts such as the Israel-Gaza war, which began in October 2023.

“  
Civilians have now become  
part of what would be  
considered legitimate  
targeting.

He also reflected on the challenges the media face in accurately reporting on this situation. In many cases, he argued that limited funding means journalists are no longer able to understand and report on the dismantling of international humanitarian law. This is especially the case when state actors are committing violations – as they control media access and therefore can control the narrative.

Senator Clonan linked this to his own experience. Years earlier, Clonan had conducted a PhD study, which revealed high levels of gender-based violence within the Irish military. When he revealed his findings, Clonan was subject to “whistleblower reprisal”.



Senator Clonan concluded by arguing that the solution requires a change in political leadership culture. He defined the current status quo as a “patriarchal system” and proposed a new kind of leadership based on a feminist approach.



# AID UNDER FIRE

## REFLECTIONS ON THE DEADLIEST YEAR FOR AID WORKERS

### Moderator



Jane-Ann McKenna is the Chief Executive Officer of Dóchas, the Irish network for international development and humanitarian organisations.

### Speakers



Alsanosi Adam is the External Communication Coordinator for the Localization Coordination Council (LCC) of the Emergency Response Rooms of Sudan.



David Kaatrud is the Director of Security Division and WFP Security Focal Point, serving to ensure the safety of WFP personnel, assets, facilities, and operations globally.



Abby Stoddard is a founding partner of Humanitarian Outcomes, an independent research group providing analysis and policy advice on international humanitarian action, and the creator of the Aid Worker Security Database.



### Key points

- 2024 was the deadliest year for aid workers on record.
- The conflict in Gaza played a huge role in this. But 2024 still would have been a record-breaking year even without it.
- Recent funding cuts will impact aid worker security. Funding cuts have been made to programmes in insecure areas where the humanitarian needs are often high. Reduced funding may also force NGOs to cut security costs, which may put aid workers at risk.

## Panel introductions

The panel began with an overview from Abby Stoddard on the security situation for aid workers today. She outlined a clear trend of increasing aid worker deaths, with 2023 and 2024 representing back-to-back record-breaking years.

Stoddard pointed out that these record-breaking years were not only attributable to the conflict in Gaza. In fact, 2024 still would have been a record-breaker without this conflict. She also shared that 2024 represented the first year in which local organisations experienced an equal number of casualties to international organisations.

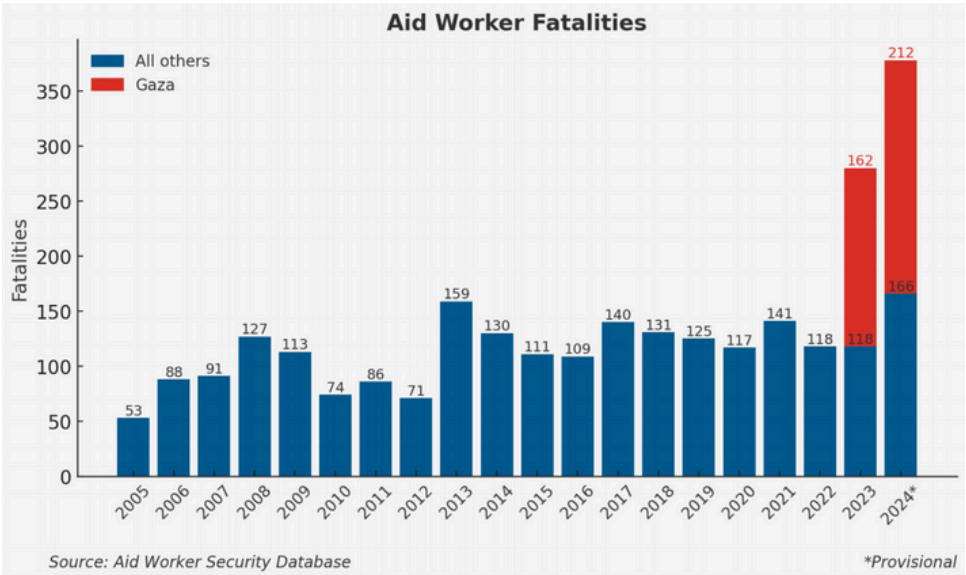
Stoddard concluded with some ideas on what is driving the increase in aid worker deaths:

- The type and intensity of conflicts is changing with the humanitarian case load increasingly concentrated in areas of ariel bombing.
- Actors who might previously have upheld international humanitarian law are now violating it. This includes state actors.
- The public attitude towards NGOs is changing, which may affect local acceptance.

The panel shifted to David Kaatrud to provide a UN perspective. He summarised the recent history of the World Food Programme’s approach to security management. He also detailed some current challenges, including the “cascading effects” of USAID funding cuts, which are impacting the UN Humanitarian Air Service, telecommunications, and other support services which aid agencies rely on.

The panel concluded with some context from Alsanosi Adam, who provided a perspective from Sudan. Adam highlighted the challenges his team face, including accusations of being collaborators by both parties in the current conflict, threats of “retaliation” when areas are reclaimed, and even targeted killings.

Adam warned that protection activities will likely be deprioritised with USAID cuts. There are already limited funds to evacuate staff from Khartoum and few routes to do so anyway – so staff are in a perilous position.



## Panel discussion

Jane-Ann McKenna directed the next section of the discussion. This began with some reflections on the concept of duty of care.

David Kaatrud explained the World Food Programme's "aggressive approach to mainstream duty of care". This includes ensuring that security and HR departments are joined up, with duty of care mainstreamed across the organisation, rather than siloed. Kaatrud explained that funding is still a challenge, but security is now seen as the cost of doing business and increasingly accepted.

Next, Abby Stoddard responded to the question of how funding cuts will impact the security of aid workers. She argued that funding cuts will lead to a contraction of NGO presence. The organisations that are left behind may be scapegoated and face hostilities. Suspicion around aid work, which has been proliferating online since the USAID cuts were announced, could fuel bad actors to target aid workers.

On the subject of mitigating risks, Kaatrud stressed the importance of high-level diplomacy to preserve humanitarian access and remind states of their obligations. Stoddard added that civil-military cooperation needs to improve to strengthen diplomatic efforts.



## Audience Q&A

### What can the private sector do?

David Kaatrud highlighted the possibility of innovation in private sector partnerships, referencing examples such as training, analysis, AI applications on mis/disinformation, and digitisation. Abby Stoddard added that the private sector can't be expected to fill the gap in funding at this scale – this is the domain of nation states. She also warned that many data sources aid organisations rely on are going dark – and this is a problem as data is a big part of security risk management.

### What was behind the shift in attitude for security risk management at the World Food Programme?

Kaatrud explained that the shift was down to the arrival of the leadership at WFP. This has resulted in a stronger duty of care framework to support national staff and their dependents – not just international staff. It was emphasised that having this push from the top can be very helpful in facilitating culture change.

### What is the role of advocacy of mutual aid groups?

Alsanosi Adam explained that the Emergency Response Rooms are part of the chain of delivery of humanitarian aid. Many actors leave when there is a crisis – but organisations like the Emergency Response Rooms are the ones who are left. This leads to a paradox. It is a challenge for these local organisations to advocate – because then they may suffer retaliation and more people may get harmed. But when no one speaks out, the number of aid workers targeted grow. So, more diplomatic pressure is needed to ensure aid workers are not targeted.



### Key action

The aid sector may soon experience a “data black out” due to funding cuts. This will have a huge impact on the sector. Abby Stoddard requests that attendees report any datasets at risk, so they can be backed up and the findings preserved.

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# THE COST OF SECURITY

## THE STATE OF FUNDING AND RESOURCING FOR SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT

### Moderator



Colm Byrne is the Gender and Humanitarian Advocacy Advisor with the Irish NGO Trócaire. He previously worked with Concern, the Red Cross Movement and Oxfam.

### Speakers



Elise Baudot Queguiner is the Head of Humanitarian Financing at the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).



Dr. Sebastian Drutschmann is the Global Security Lead / Crisis Manager for Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V. in Berlin.



Neil Elliot is the Global Head of Security for Oxfam International. He has spent 30 years in the aid sector, working in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and more.



Mike Pearson is a Research Fellow in the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI Global, specialising in humanitarian financing.



Sudhanshu S. Singh is the founder and CEO of Humanitarian Aid International (HAI), a civil society organisation working primarily in India but also seeking South-South and triangular cooperation.



## Key points

- Government funding for overseas aid has increased massively over the past decade, leaving the sector overly reliant on this kind of funding.
- Recent government funding cuts mean organisations will need to adapt – both in terms of their programmes and how they source funding.
- As the aid sector transforms, there is an opportunity to build back in a new way, with a more localised focus.
- However, the risks to security funding remain. Data will play a key role in ensuring NGOs can make the case for continued investment in security risk management.

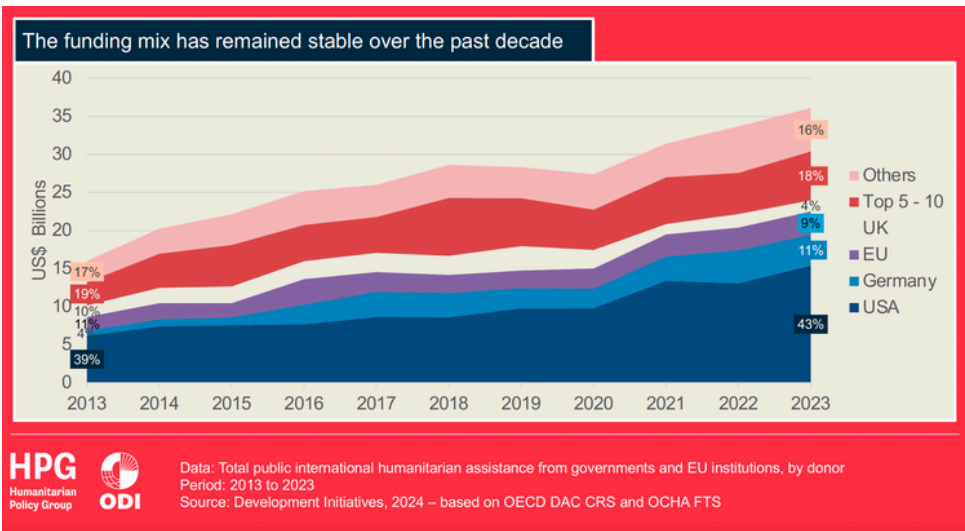
As Pearson put it, this overreliance on the same sources of funding for the last 10 years means that the system was always “built on sand”. He also highlighted that commitments to provide more funding directly to local partners have not materialised at the levels promised by the Grand Bargain.

Elise Baudot offered an NGO perspective based on inputs from ICVA’s membership. The recent rapid shutdown of funding means localisation gains will be rolled back and non-life-saving programmes will be cut back. A key message from donors is that organisations need to adapt, as the money is likely not to come back in the short term. Pooled financing mechanisms, bridge financing, and private sector engagement are all options that need to be explored.

## Panel introductions

The panel began with some insights from Mike Pearson on recent trends in government aid funding. He highlighted that funding from governments grew around 10 per cent per year during the period 2012-2023. At the same time, sector needs have been rising and 2023 marked the widest gap between need and funding received – with a 55 per cent gap.

Sudhanshu Singh emphasised that the current model of international aid emerged after World War Two. It is a system that still embodies certain disparities and biases. For instance, salaries between local and international staff are often on different scales. As the aid sector transforms in the face of recent funding cutbacks, it must rebuild in a way that moves beyond this “colonial approach”.



Neil Elliot and Sebastian Drutschmann concluded the remarks from panellists. Elliot highlighted how reduced funding means security staff will have to “do more with less” in the face of new threats, such as anti-NGO laws and cyber-attacks. Drutschmann acknowledged the inflation in security costs we have seen in recent years and argued that to make the case for continued security funding, stakeholders need to arm themselves with the correct facts and statistics.



## Q&A

### How can we prioritise our actions for 2025 and beyond?

Sebastian Drutschmann argued that we should prioritise data to make the case for security funding. He cited the case of Steve Dennis, noting that the eventual payout to Dennis (an aid worker who had been violently abducted) was only a small fraction of his organisation’s annual income. The case has been used to justify and advocate for a huge amount of security funding. But when one looks closely at the numbers, from a purely economic point of view, the spend may not be justified when weighed against the potential payouts. Drutschmann suggested we need to do better with the data we use to make the strongest arguments possible for continued security funding.

## Closing remarks

To end the session, each panellist commented on some potential solutions.

Sudhanshu Singh spoke about the need to stop categorising and profiling people. He indicated that terms like “affected populations” and “shifting the power” are well-intentioned, but create an immediate sense of hierarchy. So, we need to find a new language.



### The world is one family.

Elise Baudot spoke about the need to make full use of the public goods that are available in the sector. These include GISF’s resources and various data initiatives. By fully using these public goods, the sector can create efficiencies and cut duplication.

Neil Elliot remarked that now big international NGOs are struggling with funding. But local NGOs have always faced this struggle. As we rebuild the aid sector, we must rebuild from the “Global South” up.

Sebastian Drutschmann prefigured his remarks with a provocative quote: “I see dead people.” He explained that with funding cuts, compromises to security will be made and there will likely be tragic incidents as a result. But he also pointed out that the funding which remains from governments is being increasingly linked to political aims. That means there will be less funding for high-risk areas which are seen as offering “no benefits” to donor countries. As NGOs pull out of these areas, the risk profile of their work will change.

Mike Pearson concluded the session by arguing that now is a moment for new ideas and new narratives in the sector. He suggested that this moment provides an opportunity to reshape the sector, so that we are not back in the same position in another 10 years’ time.

# SECURITY FUNDING

## DONOR POLICIES AND PRACTICE

### Moderator



Jon Novakovic is the Executive Director of the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF). He has spent 10 years in the aid sector, working in security risk management within local and international NGOs, and private consultancy.

### Presenter



Alyssa Thurston is Policy and Advocacy Adviser at the Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF). Previously, she was the Policy and Advocacy Manager for the CDAC Network.

### Speakers



Katrine Thomsen works as a Security Policy Officer in the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), European Commission.



Marieke van Weerden is Senior Director of Health, Safety and Security at Catholic Relief Services. She also serves on GISF's Steering Group.



### Key points

- There are many gaps and inconsistencies in government funding for NGO security.
- Donors should strengthen their expertise on security and provide clearer guidelines in their application processes.
- However, the responsibility for strengthening security guidelines should not rest solely with donors – the whole community must play a part.
- NGOs have key responsibilities. These include: having reserve funding for security, expanding their definition of security to include mental health and psychosocial services, and understanding donor perspectives on security.

## Opening remarks

The session was prefaced by some impromptu opening remarks from Nicole McHugh, Humanitarian Director at Irish Aid.

She began by expressing her appreciation for the openness and frankness shown by the Conference participants. And she reiterated that Ireland's commitment to humanitarian response is unchanged.

“  
We as donors really  
need to do things  
differently.

McHugh added that donors must do things differently with respect to security funding. She stressed that the security conversation needs to be heard by other donor agencies and security advocates should try to get themselves into these spaces.

She highlighted some major concerns related to the recent funding crisis. The disappearance of smaller organisations is a definite priority for donors. The incoming “black hole of data” is also a major concern. McHugh has had conversations with eight other key donors about this.

She concluded by saying that we shouldn't underestimate donors' support for enablers – they are aware that the system needs these functions.



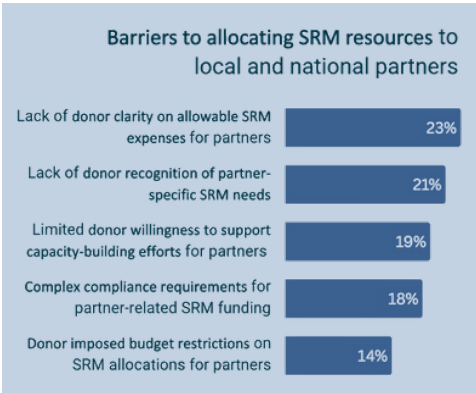
## Presentation

The session began with a presentation from Alyssa Thurston. This highlighted some preliminary results from a study GISF launched in December 2024 on donor approaches to security risk management.

The objective of the study was to understand NGO experiences with institutional government donors’ policies regarding safety and security and to identify actionable recommendations. Responses were collected from 68 participants from GISF members.

Key challenges and barriers identified by the study:

1. Funding for security risk management remains highly inconsistent across government donors. Most lack any guidance or specific reference to security. Furthermore, security costs are often subject to restrictive conditions which limits NGOs’ ability to allocate adequate funding for security risk management.
2. Local partner inclusion is a challenge. For example, 60 per cent of respondents said they face difficulties in allocating security resources to their local and national partners due to donor conditions.
3. Many respondents perceive donors’ limited security risk management expertise as a key factor leading to restrictive funding structures and a “tick-box” approach that prioritises compliance over practical security improvements.
4. Many respondents said they encountered situations where their organisation had to start implementing a project with insufficient security due to donor restrictions limiting adequate funding.



Thurston concluded by offering some initial headline recommendations:

1. There should be greater flexibility and clarity in donor guidelines and budgeting.
2. Donors should improve supportive funding practices for local and national partners.
3. Donors should strengthen their expertise and engagement on safety and security.
4. The sector should adapt and scale successful models for security risk management funding.





## Panel discussion

Katrine Thomsen began by providing some perspective from DG-ECHO. They have 400 staff in field offices around the world in over 40 countries. In addition, they have a security team consisting of eight staff in Brussels and eight more globally. This presence gives them a greater understanding of the operational reality, to inform policy work and funding frameworks. Having said that, Thomsen acknowledged that there is still work to be done by donors when it comes to strengthening security risk management guidelines. But it is also a shared responsibility among the whole community.

Marieke van Weerden spoke next, providing some reactions to the presentation. She suggested that NGOs don't need more guidance from donors, as more guidance just means more restrictions. What is needed is more flexible funding.

Van Weerden then spoke on what NGOs themselves can do. She argued that every healthy organisation should have a reserve dedicated to safety and security. She gave an example of an organisation which held a dedicated funding reserve for unforeseen security incidents, which would then be transferred to programmes if not spent.

Thomsen then responded to the question of whether donors have a good enough understanding of how security works for NGOs. She felt they do not. But there is a need for transparency and knowledge on both sides. At ECHO, security costs have to be included, so security expertise is needed by those writing the proposals.

Van Weerden added that NGOs also need to understand how donors understand security. This starts with security staff understanding how their funding works. They can then speak the language to those in their organisations who write proposals. And they can then work with them to speak the "donor language".



She also argued that the focus should not only be on hard security costs. Health and psychosocial support should also be prioritised. It can take some convincing for these health aspects to be taken on board. This involves building case studies and collecting data. But once they are introduced, some key improvements can be monitored, such as the numbers of emergency medical evacuations.

The discussion concluded with a reflection on whether donors should work together more to align their expectations for implementing partners. Thomsen agreed that this would be a good idea, but should encompass the donor community as a whole, including development banks and the private sector. Van Weerden cautioned that there would need to be transparency and a careful approach on who should be invited to those conversations, citing some donors which have potential links to human rights violations.

## Audience Q&A

**Flexible funding is so important for NGOs, but it is capped at seven per cent. This seems like an arbitrary figure. Is there any scope to move beyond this?**

Katrine Thomsen noted that USAID was good with this, but cuts to USAID funding will likely result in cuts to overall flexible funding. At ECHO, there is an acknowledgement that seven per cent is far below the real operating costs of an organisation. But they are discussing how to stand in these circumstances and how funding security should play a bigger role in the future.

**Can we learn something from corporate donors and industrial philanthropists?**

Marieke van Weerden shared that some organisations take important donors out to see the real-world impact of their funding. They use storytelling to move their donors who then also spread the message within their networks. When people really understand the programmes and what it takes to deliver them, they are more likely to support and to support flexibly.



**Has anyone ever received funding just for security? [Directed to the room]**

One delegate shared his experience, in which the Swiss government funded two international staff for security roles. It was explained that organisations cannot get into many areas without security and there is no effective aid without security to begin with. So, if donors can fund that, then everything trickles down.



# CONSOLIDATING SECURITY RESOURCES WORKING IN CONSORTIA AND SHARED SERVICES

## Moderator



Birke Herzbruch is the Head of Portfolio for Fragile and Conflict-Affected States at Trócaire.

## Speakers



Peter Ott is a former Irish Defence Forces officer with over 23 years of service. He is now based in Kyiv where he serves as the Health Safety and Security Advisor for the Caritas Forum.



Pascal Valette has served as Security Manager at Gret since 2019, and for the joint security service between AVSF and Gret since September 2024.



## Key points

- There are several models through which separate NGOs can share a single security service.
- This can create cost savings and better job security (as roles are funded by more diverse funding sources).
- In practice, not all NGOs will be able to develop a shared security service so easily.
- To successfully create a shared service, organisations need strong guidance, with case studies to model themselves on. They also need networking opportunities to identify complementary organisations.

## Opening remarks

Birke Herzbruch opened the session by acknowledging the challenging funding moment facing the sector. She explained that in this situation, it is more important than ever for the sector to work together as a collective.

With this in mind, she outlined the focus of the session: how we can pool our resources for security.

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We need to do more  
with less.

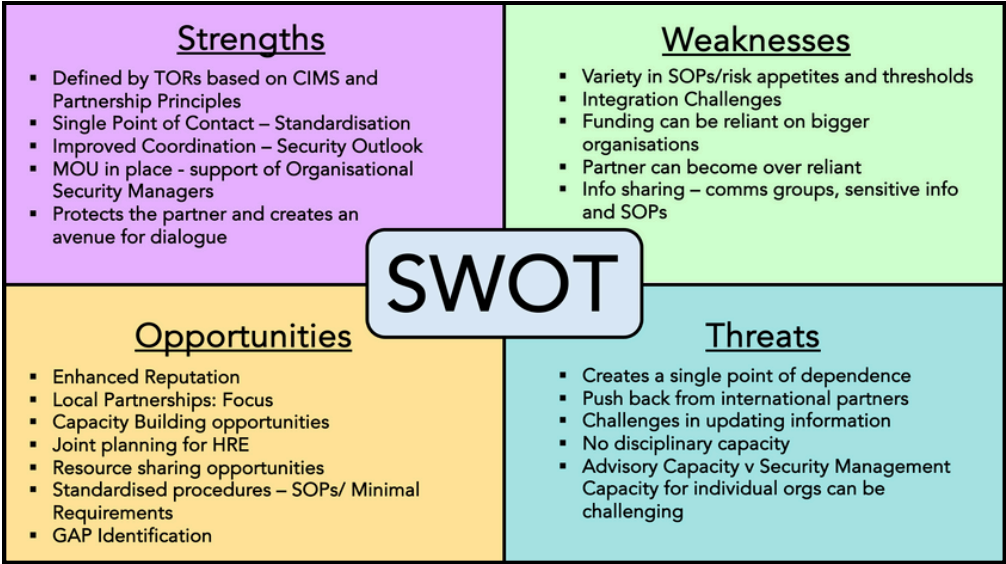
## Presentation

The session began with two case studies, presented by Peter Ott and Pascal Valette.

Peter Ott began, outlining the structure of the Caritas Forum in Ukraine and how security resources are shared. He explained that Caritas is part of a federation, with Caritas Internationalis sitting on top. So, no organisation working with the Caritas forum works in isolation. The scale is quite large, with over 2,000 people in the local Caritas organisations in Ukraine alone. In some respects, it is similar to the structure around the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Ott presented a diagram of the structure, as it applies to his work in Ukraine. Despite the complexity of the model, he stated that it worked well and there is no reason why two or three organisations that are like-minded couldn't do something similar to the Caritas structure.

He concluded by presenting a SWOT analysis of the model (see below).



Pascal Valette showed a quite different example of shared services. In 2024, two completely separate organisations – Gret and Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (AVSF) – created a joint security service. Neither organisation had a security culture before.



Valette explained that the idea came about because the organisations have a common history and so a merger was proposed. Although this was rejected by the governance, it generated an idea of an alliance for some services that could be shared. Security was highlighted because of the increasing insecurity in some contexts.

The aim of the service is to create a common security culture in both NGOs that meets the best standards of the sector. It is overseen by a Security Executive Committee which features members from both organisations. Valette proposed that this structure might work for others and posited that it is more financially secure, as having a role split across two organisations means there are diverse funding sources supporting the security function.

## Q&A

### Were these models actually money-saving?

Peter Ott explained that there was definitely a cost saving within Caritas. It works under the confederation, but it would probably be different under a different kind of situation.

**Are there any challenges with insurance? In the sector, we are often charged huge premiums and we can't self-insure death in service benefits.**

The models should provide some cost efficiency for insurance as well.

A GISF staff member mentioned that GISF had organised several meetings with insurers in London (the main insurance market) a few years ago and it's something that could be done again.

One delegate added that there is an insurance event in Berlin in June and he can share details through GISF.





## Breakout groups

The room was divided into four groups, with each focussing on a different question.

### Has your organisation explored other shared security service models?

Trócaire has a security position in Lebanon which is funded by five different Caritas agencies. It's similar to the model Peter Ott presented, but on a smaller scale.

Another example was also shared from Amnesty International. The main security team is at the international secretariat. This is cost effective, as you can have eight people doing security for 40+ territories. But it can create some challenges. For example, security staff might be hired in programme locations without consulting the global team. This means the global team are in charge of certain of staff but don't directly line manage them.

The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) was mentioned as a good model of shared service. But the challenge is that they are not present in all countries.

The discussion also touched on information sharing as a form of shared service. It was noted that there often seems to be a culture of secrecy around information. NGO security staff may feel that sharing information puts a certain responsibility on them. But sharing information can also be one of the most powerful ways of collaborating and avoiding duplicated efforts.

### What are the key barriers or challenges to exploring shared security service models?

One challenge of implementing a shared service model between organisations is that the risk ratio is often very different between organisations. It was also noted that the Gret/AVSF partnership might work because the organisations share a common culture and language – going beyond this might present challenges.

The question of liability also came up a number of times. When security services are shared, should liability be shared as well?

### What are some of the possible solutions?

Solutions can vary in complexity. One simple example would be for organisations to share subscriptions for information services. These kinds of services would not even require a shared corporate culture.

However, for more advanced forms of service sharing, organisations will need to share the same norms and values. Trust is essential.

Some possible examples of shared services included shared compounds, shared training services, and even shared insurance, in which people and organisations in an alliance or consortium would be on the same policy.

It was noted that for shared services to succeed it would be important to have buy-in from senior staff and to have some stability, with people remaining in their posts for a long time.



**How can the humanitarian sector help take things forward and support shared security services and pooling of resources? Provide Recommendations for GISF / Donors / NGOs / Others**

For GISF, it was suggested that they could produce guidance on different shared service models and how to merge security functions. This could also include case studies, which are consistently highlighted as some of the most useful aspects of GISF's content. These could include both successful and unsuccessful stories of shared services. Finally, as a membership network, GISF could help facilitate connections between complementary organisations looking to combine services.

For donors, they could look to fund pilot programmes to test different security models. They should also commit to funding safety and security appropriately, as well as to providing flexible funding.

NGOs can start with small collaborations and grow from there. It was also noted that NGOs need to stop the culture of competition if shared models are to be fostered successfully. It is also the responsibility of NGOs to define the security need to donors, so they can fund it more effectively.

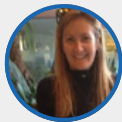
Finally, there was a suggestion that consortia with corporate partners could be considered as another option.



# RESOURCING SECURITY

## EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MODELS AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

### Moderator



Maureen Magee is Global Director of Health, Safety, and Security at the Norwegian Refugee Council.

### Speakers



Ellen Brooks is Director for Innovative Finance at IRC's Airbel Impact Lab, managing a portfolio of projects realigning capital behind humanitarian outcomes.



Simon Meldrum established the Humanitarian Finance Forum in 2021, a multi-stakeholder community that promotes the innovative use of financial markets to address humanitarian challenges.



Paul Westbury serves as GOAL's Global Safety & Access Advisor and currently lives in Rwanda.



### Key points

- The aid sector is facing a funding crisis. But there are alternative funding models and innovative finance solutions that the sector can pivot towards.
- NGOs need to do better at making the case for funding to private sector partners.
- Private investors and NGOs can help each other. Investors want to drive social outcomes, but they lack experience and market knowledge to invest in acute contexts. On the other hand, NGOs know how to drive change, but they lack the capital to fulfill their ambition.

## Presentations

Simon Meldrum gave the first presentation, which focused on leveraging alternative funding solutions. He outlined the different humanitarian finance tools, their pros and cons, the key questions organisations need to ask themselves before exploring these models, and reflections on what could and would not work in terms of resourcing security risk management.

Meldrum also touched on the funding crisis for the international aid sector. He contended that nothing will go back to normal. Aid will become increasingly aligned/conditioned on government priorities and uncertainty will last for a long time. He drew parallels to the financial crisis in 2008 and pointed to some impact reports from the Humanitarian Finance Forum as a useful reference.



Simon Meldrum's presentation drew on [this document from the International Institute for Management Development](#) as a key resource.

Ellen Brooks gave the next presentation. She introduced The Advisory Model for Investor and Humanitarian Partnerships from the International Rescue Committee (IRC). She outlined the benefits and added value of the model, its challenges/limitations, and its potential to support additional resourcing of NGO security risk management.

Brooks argued that money is not the issue – it's the systems that are the problem. Grant funding mechanisms are part of the problem – it's not an efficient system. NGOs need to create their value proposition to investors and partners.

Brooks highlighted some key enabling factors:



Translation:

Humanitarians speak different languages from the development and private sectors. So, NGOs need to explain the value of humanitarian security risk management to a private sector audience.



Valuation:

Work that is covered by grants is often inefficiently budgeted. So, NGOs need to determine costs and develop budgets accordingly. The private and development sectors will not allow for fringe costs to be covered by consulting contracts.



Humanitarian principles:

Humanitarian principles align with sustainability goals of most businesses. So, humanitarians can hold to account and safeguard these commitments.

Paul Westbury gave the final presentation. He outlined GOAL's journey in establishing private-sector partnerships to fund security training for all GOAL staff, from the initial concept, preparing the pitch, to securing funding.

Westbury outlined eight steps:

1. Identify companies whose missions align with safety and security.
2. Investigate their current CSR strategies to find potential targets.
3. Assess existing relationships that may facilitate outreach.
4. Develop tailored pitches, as there might be multiple approaches required.
5. Be prepared to demonstrate impact – companies will want to know the benefits for them.
6. Familiarise yourself with commercial terminology.
7. Clearly define your objectives.
8. To broaden your reach to potential funders, explore associations within the sector and engage with them.



## Breakout groups

The room was divided into four groups, with each focussing on a different question.

**Has your organisation explored alternative funding solutions to help support security? If so, please share details.**

Some organisations have – private companies have been approached with mixed results. These partnerships can be slow to start, so case studies and data are important to build a portfolio that will lead to larger finance and funding initiatives. There are very few examples of this actually working well or working consistently.

**What are the key barriers or challenges to exploring these approaches?**

One of simplest barriers is that people are stuck in the mindset of old funding models. They may not have the skills or understanding to pursue innovative opportunities with the private sector. They may not speak the right 'language' for the alternative finance sectors that they need to approach.

Another barrier is around the perception of taking money from the private sector. There is a culture of refusing money, but this may have to change and NGOs may need to be open to working with partners they wouldn't previously have considered.

**What are some for the possible solutions?**

Organisations should leverage what and who they know and start from there. They should also establish clear red lines on who they will partner with, develop robust contracts, and pick the right organisations to target for financing.

It was also noted that the aid sector can provide services to private industry for profit – training, analysis, contextualisation etc.



**How can the sector (Organisations/Donors/ GISF/Others) help take things forward and support the use of alternative funding models for SRM?**

There needs to be more education, experience sharing, and resources for people in the sector around the topic. IRC have published a playbook and published case studies to help with this.

For NGOs, they need to change their mindset and approach. This includes being less closed minded about who they take money from. It also includes making the case for partnership more strongly. For example, pitching themselves as helping organisations meet their CSR goals.

For donors, it was suggested that a security risk management specific donor organisation could be built from the ground up.

// Investors possess significant capital and the desire to drive social outcomes. But they lack experience and market knowledge to invest in acute contexts. Humanitarians possesses deep humanitarian expertise over decades of solution implementation and results tracking, alongside our robust footprint in acute contexts.



# SECURITY RESOURCING FOR LOCAL NGOS

## BUILDING EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS IN RISK

### Moderator



Sheetal Rana is the Global Director of Partnership and Localisation at Trócaire, based in Nairobi.

### Speakers



Peter M. Egwudah is the Chair of the Adamawa NGO Network in Nigeria.



Nimo Hassan leads the Somali NGO Consortium (SNC), a coordination mechanism of NGOs for NGOs.



Tarini Ross is the Head of Humanitarian Programmes at Humanitarian Aid International. She leads disaster and conflict responses, the Pakistani refugee programme, and global advocacy efforts.

### Key points

- Local NGOs are the main drivers of humanitarian action. But they face greater barriers in terms of accessing funding, training and resources than their international counterparts. There is an unfair power imbalance.
- Donors and international partners tend not to prioritise funding for local security management. Local organisations mainly rely on overheads for security management.
- There are some free or low-cost solutions local NGOs can use. But these should not be a replacement for proper security funding.
- Security resources provided by international partners need to be adapted for local contexts.

## Introduction

Local NGOs form the backbone of humanitarian efforts. But despite their vital role, they face barriers in accessing the funding, training, and infrastructure required to safeguard their staff and operations. The session examined the power imbalances in security resource allocation and explored practical solutions for equitable partnerships.

## Presentations

The session began with Sheetal Rana presenting findings from Trócaire's consultation with partner organisations operating in high-risk environments, including Ethiopia, South Sudan, Ukraine and Gaza.

On the subject of capacity building, the key finding was that international partners do provide technical support to develop security management plans. However:

- Its implementation is difficult due to resource constraints.
- Support is often not adequately contextualised to local security realities.
- Local organisations operate with higher security risk thresholds and prioritise community services over security.

On the subject of funding for safety and security, the key finding was that donors and international partners tend to not prioritise funding for local security management. Local organisations mainly rely on overheads for security management.

Finally, on the subject of decision-making with partners, the key finding was security planning between international and national NGOs is rarely approached as a shared responsibility. Local and national organisations often have little influence over security decisions.

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There is no serious discussion that makes a joint kind of decision-making.

- NGO leader, Ethiopia

Tarini Ross presented next, providing a perspective from local NGOs in India. She highlighted a culture of non-financial peer support – by local actors for local actors.

She stated that 49 per cent of NGOs don't have security infrastructure. So networks for peer exchange, such as GISF, can provide a useful platform for non-financial modes of support.

Next, Nimo Hassan provided an overview of the Somali NGO Consortium, a coordination mechanism of NGOs for NGOs. Given the highly insecure environment, the complexity of the operating environment and the large numbers of agencies working in Somalia, a coherent and unified NGO voice is critical to successful development policies and humanitarian assistance provision. She also detailed how the task force has put together a tool for partner capacity assessments and they could incorporate security into this.

Finally, Peter Egwudah gave a perspective from an NGO network in Nigeria. He commented on the Grand Bargain and how it has not been implemented to its fullest. He also remarked on how local NGOs struggle with partnership agreements as they are all different – even across the UN system. Standardisation would be key to better working partnerships.

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Local actors don't have the power. We add a voice but don't make decisions.

- Peter Egwudah

## Q&A

**So much can be done with security with so little budget. Can partners do more to take on the low and no cost activities?**

Some low- or no-cost activities have proven to be effective, such as peer-to-peer sharing. But many of the basic tools that INGOs use need to be contextualised for local contexts.

There are also some things that will always need funding. So, while low- and no-cost solutions are welcome, they shouldn't be a replacement for properly funded security risk management.

**Has the UN picked up the idea of standardisation?**

The localisation working group in Somalia invites donors to join. But who joins and engages depends on the individual people and personal relationships.

Overall, donors need to engage with all downstream partners more. Information isn't shared enough and it is all too secretive.

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Risk is very person-centred. The mitigation has to be defined by the person, not just the organisation.

## Breakout groups

The room was divided into four groups, with each focussing on a different question.

**How does your organisation ensure partners have access to sufficient resources for security?**

The harmonised capacity strengthening plans from the Somalia NGO Consortium was mentioned as one example of a way to ensure local resources for security are shared and made available.

GISF's resources were also cited. Sharing these with local partners is one effective way to ensure information on best practices is readily available.

**What are the key barriers or challenges to fostering equitable partnerships and the fair allocation of resources?**

Resources can't be 'one size fits all'. Tools need to be useable by non-subject matter experts and available in a range of languages. We need to focus on what the partners need.

We have been repeating the conversation on equitable partnerships for years. What is the problem? Is information not being shared with the right people? Are we working in silos?



### What are some of the possible solutions?

Expanding the availability of online training might be a good solution for ensuring learning opportunities are equally available for both international and national organisations.

Pooling common services, especially insurance, was another suggested solution.

The idea of creating a 'due diligence passport' was also suggested. This would mean that instead of having to go through due diligence process with every partnership, organisations would go through the check once and be issued a 'passport' enabling immediate approval for every new partner. This 'passport' could be renewed every few years.

Finally, it was suggested that creative budgeting might be another solution for ensuring that security is included in project budgets.



### How can the sector (Organisations/Donors/ GISF/Others) help take things forward to ensure fair access to security resources for local NGOs and frontline workers?

There were a number of solutions suggested for GISF.

GISF could provide support with getting local NGOs onto Disaster Ready, an online portal providing free training related to security risk management. GISF could also support with ensuring more trainings on the platform are suited for local NGOs.

GISF could also produce certain resources. These would include simplified resources for risk sharing, as well as country-level toolkits.

Finally, GISF can help facilitate collective advocacy for security resourcing with donors, drawing on its membership body.

For donors, there was also a suggested action around meeting more with local and national organisations, rather than only meeting with international NGOs.





# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations were developed collaboratively by the Conference attendees under four themes.



## 1. Maximising government donor resources for security



### Recommendations for government donors

- Develop donor capacity to meaningfully engage on partner security. This could be by providing staff with training on NGO security risk management, or strengthening links between donor grant-making functions and existing security knowledge and expertise.
- Increase engagement with NGOs, security professionals, and security networks to deepen understanding of operational challenges and improve funding mechanisms, strengthen best practices, and ensure donor policies reflect the realities of high-risk operating environments.
- Establish a Donor Working Group for safety and security. This would provide a platform for donor security coordination and help avoid duplication of efforts.
- Ensure flexibility in budgeting and include security as a programmatic cost, allowing for adjustments as risks evolve.



### Recommendations for GISF

- Develop sector-wide good practice principles for SRM funding, in collaboration with donors and NGOs.
- Facilitate donor-NGO exchanges to foster ongoing dialogue and co-development of solutions for sustainable security funding.



### Recommendations for NGOs

- Continue to advocate with internal leadership, programming, and business development teams to ensure security costs are more accurately reflected in project proposals and budgets, using clear justifications.
- Raise internal awareness among grants and programmes teams on budgeting for security.



## 2. Exploring alternative funding and financing solutions



### Recommendations for GISF

- Develop guidance on how businesses and foundations can support security risk management.
- Develop a GISF-led dialogue series to facilitate engagement between the humanitarian sector and private sector actors, ensuring mutual understanding of risks and funding priorities.
- Map out free and subsidised security resources available to NGOs, promoting better access to existing tools and services.



### Recommendations for NGOs

- Develop clear value propositions for security risk management, demonstrating the return on investment for non-traditional funders.
- Support internal fundraising teams with security expertise.
- Conduct risk assessments on non-traditional funders to ensure alignment with humanitarian principles.





### 3. Consolidating security resources and sharing services



#### Recommendations for government donors

- Provide incentives for NGOs to collaborate on shared security models, including dedicated funding streams for consortia-based security initiatives.
- Allow for cost-sharing agreements among NGOs for security services and capacity building initiatives.



#### Recommendations for NGOs

- Identify existing shared security initiatives and build on these rather than creating new ones from scratch.
- Engage donors and internal teams in discussions on shared services.

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#### Recommendations for GISF

- Develop governance frameworks for shared security services. These could include best practices, case studies, cost-sharing models, and practical templates and tools to facilitate collaboration and help avoid duplication of efforts (e.g., MoUs, cost-sharing agreements, shared training resources).
- Act as a broker for pooled security services, negotiating partnerships that benefit GISF members. For example, this could include collective insurance or risk analysis services.
- Establish a global roster of security experts to rapidly fill security capacity gaps.





## 4. Enhancing security resourcing for local and national partners



### Recommendations for government donors

- Engage in proactive dialogue with downstream L/NGO partners to understand the security risks they face and collaborate on solutions.
- Invest in insurance models or subsidies, ensuring affordable coverage for L/NGOs.



### Recommendations for GISF

- Lead the development of guiding principles for security risk sharing to support more equitable security partnerships.
- Partner with L/NGO platforms to create opportunities for structured engagement with donors.
- Explore a due diligence passport system for security. This would allow accredited local NGOs to meet partnership security requirements without undergoing repeated, duplicative vetting processes.
- Explore scalable aid worker insurance solutions tailored for L/NGOs, leveraging GISF's convening power to create sector-wide options.



### Recommendations for NGOs

- Advocate internally to ensure security costs for local partners are included in funding proposals and budgets.
- Explore technological solutions, such as AI-driven compliance tools, to streamline security due diligence for local NGOs.

# THANK YOU

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Thank you for attending the GISF 2025 Global Security Risk and Policy Conference.

We look forward to seeing you again next year.

The Global Interagency Security Forum

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