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2026 Global Security Conference

Conference Report

Collective Strength
Against Emerging Threats

26 – 28 May I London

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The session 'Why We're Safer Together: Opportunities for collaboration in security risk management'

1. ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

GISF's Global Security Risk & Policy Conference is the largest security gathering in the aid sector, bringing together a diverse ecosystem of NGO security professionals, UN agencies, donors, coordination bodies, and private-sector partners to confront challenges directly.

This year's theme, *Collective Strength Against Emerging Threats,* reflected the growing recognition that partnerships, shared systems, and coordinated action are now key to keeping staff safe and maintaining secure access to communities in need. Even as global attention to aid worker protection increases, resources for security risk management (SRM) are under strain, leaving organisations to absorb more risk with fewer enabling services.

Through a mix of engaging panels, breakout sessions, and shared learning, participants examined innovative approaches and good practices aimed at fostering stronger security cooperation and mutual support.

This document details the key insights and recommendations that emerged from the Conference, grouped into recommendations for operational organisations, coordination bodies, donors, and the policy space. This is followed by the actions deemed highest priority by attendees, and notes from each day of the conference.

Thank You!
We would like to thank all who attended the conference for their thoughtful engagement and enthusiastic contributions to discussions across the two days. This year's conference was made possible through the support of our commercial partners and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Our Conference Sponsors
We also extend our gratitude to our Headline and Event Sponsors, International Location Safety and Thrive Worldwide, for their support of this event.

Exhibitors at this year's Conference:

2. KEY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Security collaboration between operational organisations

Who does this collaboration include?
This section focusses on collaboration between operational organisations directly implementing programming and managing security risks, including international and national NGOs, UN agencies, and civil society actors.

What we learned:

1. **Security collaboration is increasingly being driven by the necessity for efficiency**
   - Escalating risks, funding reductions, and growing operational complexity are making it more difficult for organisations to maintain security capacity through standalone approaches. Collaboration is increasingly being considered to sustain core capabilities and address challenges that no single organisation can effectively manage alone.
   - The increasing appetite for a shift towards shared and mutualised services reflects a broader recognition that some security capabilities may be more sustainable when delivered collectively rather than organisation by organisation. Experiences from Ukraine also demonstrated how grassroots partnerships between local and international organisations can create innovative models for extending basic security support to frontline organisations and volunteer groups.
   - Information exchange remains a core component of security coordination, but collaboration is increasingly extending into joint preparedness, contingency planning, evacuation planning, surge support arrangements, and coordinated incident response. The most effective collaborative approaches increasingly combine analysis with practical mechanisms for preparedness, decision-making, and response.



Delegates catch up between sessions




Delegates catch up between sessions

2. Security collaboration increasingly depends on organisational decisions

- Decisions about more aspirational shared services, collective security arrangements and mutual support require engagement beyond security teams alone.
- Effective collaboration depends on organisational leadership, incentives, governance arrangements, and willingness to share resources, information, and decision-making.
- Expanding collaboration is not solely a security management challenge, but also a broader organisational challenge.

3. The challenge is increasingly about influence rather than participation

- Participation of local and national organisations within security initiatives has expanded relative to earlier years.
- The key question is increasingly not whether local actors are present within collaborative structures, but whether they are shaping them. This has implications for how collaborative initiatives are designed, governed, and resourced, particularly in contexts where local organisations possess the strongest contextual knowledge, community relationships, and operational access.
- Experiences from Ukraine and Sudan highlighted how locally-led alliances and volunteer-led response structures can create alternative models for collaboration, allowing local organisations to shape priorities, share analysis, and coordinate responses on their own terms.

4. Restricted operating environments are changing how organisations collaborate

- In some contexts, collaboration itself has become a risk that requires active management. Surveillance, monitoring of communications, restrictions on civil society activity, and sensitivities around information-sharing are reshaping how organisations coordinate and exchange information.
- These conditions are driving greater reliance on trusted informal networks, smaller operationally-focused arrangements, and more deliberate approaches to information-sharing, which can result in some organisations being excluded from the process.

Security collaboration through coordination and enabling functions

Who does this collaboration include?
This section focusses on collaboration through the organisations, mechanisms, and services that support collective security across the sector, including security coordination platforms, NGO forums, GISF, Saving Lives Together, and other enabling structures.

What we learned:

1. Security coordination and enabling functions are increasingly recognised as essential infrastructure

- NGO forums, security coordination platforms, analysis providers, and collective support services were consistently identified as functions that organisations rely upon to inform decisions, manage risks, and maintain access.
- At the same time, a recurring tension emerged between reliance and investment. While organisations increasingly depend on these systems, many of those systems face uncertain funding outlooks and struggle to fit within traditional project-based funding models.
- There are emerging donor efforts to support collective security services, including dedicated funding for collective security services and efforts to map security support systems across the sector.

2. Security coordination and enabling functions are supporting a more complex operating environment

- Many existing coordination models were developed around formal humanitarian structures, international organisations, and relatively predictable operating environments.
- Today, security outcomes are increasingly influenced by a wider range of actors than those traditionally represented within humanitarian coordination structures, including volunteer networks, community-based organisations, local civil society groups, and informal response actors.
- As this ecosystem has expanded, the challenge has shifted from establishing coordination mechanisms to ensuring that different parts of the system are visible, connected, and mutually reinforcing.


Group work during a breakout session


Networking after the Conference

3. Effective UN–NGO collaboration will be defined by increases to practical cooperation

- The strongest examples of UN–NGO collaboration focused on practical cooperation rather than formal structures. Joint contingency planning, evacuation planning, preparedness exercises, information-sharing, and coordinated responses to security incidents were consistently identified as areas where collaboration delivers tangible operational value.
- There is growing acknowledgement within the UN system that stronger relationships with NGOs require regular dialogue, investment, trust-building, and greater understanding of each other's contexts and constraints.
- Experiences from South Sudan highlighted how close cooperation between NGO forums, operational organisations, and UN actors can support collective decision-making during periods of heightened risk. Discussions around Saving Lives Together (SLT) similarly reflected growing interest in strengthening practical cooperation and mutual support rather than creating additional coordination mechanisms.

Security collaboration with the private sector

Who does this collaboration include?
This section focusses on collaboration between humanitarian organisations and specialist service providers, including security companies, technology providers, insurers, assistance providers, training organisations, and other private-sector actors.

What we learned

1. Access to specialist services is becoming a growing determinant of security capacity

- Many organisations increasingly rely on external providers for specialist capabilities such as cyber security, insurance, risk analysis, crisis response support, digital security, and training.
- Access to these services is becoming an increasingly important component of effective security risk management, particularly as emerging risks become more technical and specialised.
- However, access remains uneven across the sector. Cost, procurement requirements, technical infrastructure, and organisational capacity continue to limit access for many smaller organisations and local actors.
- In several cases, the challenge was not simply the availability of services, but whether they were designed around the specific needs of NGOs, as well as organisations' ability to sustain, maintain, and effectively utilise them once introduced.

2. Trust remains one of the biggest barriers to effective private-sector engagement

- Organisations frequently rely on informal referrals and personal networks when identifying specialist providers.
- There is currently no widely-accepted mechanism for sharing experiences, assessing provider quality, or identifying trusted partners across the sector.
- This often results in less efficient procurement processes, inconsistent standards, and higher barriers to entry for both aid actors and service providers.
- Participants repeatedly highlighted the potential value of shared vetting mechanisms, quality assurance frameworks, provider directories, case studies, and peer review systems to help organisations make more informed decisions.

3. Aid actors and commercial actors continue to operate with different assumptions and incentives

- Procurement requirements, internal bureaucracy, donor restrictions, and organisational perceptions of the private sector continue to create barriers to collaboration.
- Commercial services are not always designed around the operating realities of aid actors, while aid actors often lack the capacity, technical expertise, or commercial experience needed to engage effectively with specialist providers.
- Several organisations highlighted challenges in assessing value for money, interpreting technical outputs, and identifying solutions that are proportionate to their needs.
- The challenge is often not a lack of suitable services, but a lack of shared understanding between aid and commercial actors.









Delegates speak with commercial partners exhibiting at the Conference

4. The most valuable relationships are increasingly based on partnership rather than procurement

- The strongest examples focused on long-term relationships that combine humanitarian operational expertise with specialist technical knowledge.
- Private-sector actors are increasingly contributing expertise, innovation, learning, and problem-solving support in addition to delivering specific services.
- Effective partnerships create opportunities for humanitarian organisations to influence how technologies, products, and services are designed and adapted for operational contexts; and are characterised by mutual learning and shared problem-solving.
- Organisations highlighted the value of providers that are willing to adapt products, services, and approaches to humanitarian contexts rather than offering standardised commercial solutions.

Security collaboration with funders and the policy space

Who does this collaboration include?
This section focusses on collaboration between humanitarian organisations, government donors, funding mechanisms, policymakers, and other initiatives and actors responsible for shaping the policy environment in which collective security takes place.

What we learned

1. Donors are increasingly taking a more systemic view of security risk management

- Flexible and protected security budget lines were consistently identified as one of the most important enablers of effective security risk management.
- Donors highlighted increasing interest in understanding how security initiatives, collective services, and support mechanisms fit together across the wider sector and where investments can have the greatest impact.
- Donor support for collective security initiatives reflected growing recognition that some security investments generate benefits across multiple organisations and entire responses.
- Funding structures can either enable or constrain collaboration. Greater flexibility in how security resources are allocated could help organisations invest in shared services, collective preparedness, coordination mechanisms, and other collaborative approaches.
- The challenge is increasingly not simply how to fund security activities, but how to support a combination of organisational capacity, collective approaches, and enabling systems that strengthen security outcomes across the wider ecosystem.

2. Donor engagement on security risk management is becoming more collaborative

- Security risk management is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion between donors rather than solely between donors and implementing organisations.
- Emerging cross-donor coordination and efforts to strengthen alignment within donor agencies reflect growing interest in sharing learning, comparing approaches, and identifying common priorities.
- Several donors highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue with operational organisations to better understand evolving risks, operational realities, and the practical implications of donor policies and funding approaches.
- Greater alignment has the potential to reduce inconsistencies, improve predictability, and strengthen support for effective security risk management across the sector.





From the panel discussion 'Donor Perspectives: Supporting security as a collective good'

3. PRIORITY ACTIONS

The conference highlighted that strengthening security risk management requires action across multiple parts of the humanitarian security ecosystem. While responsibilities differ, many of the challenges identified were interconnected and cannot be addressed by any single actor alone.

Priority actions in green were ranked highly by conference participants

For operational organisations, coordination, and enabling functions

Make operational collaboration routine

- Operational organisations, NGO forums, and UN coordination mechanisms should establish more consistent and predictive mechanisms for joint contingency planning, evacuation planning, crisis management, and training arrangements with peer organisations operating in the same context.
- Building on principles developed by ICVA's pilot programme (NGO Joint Services during Onset Emergencies), operational organisations and coordination mechanisms can explore development of pre-established mutual support arrangements for surge capacity, incident response, and staff support.
- Operational organisations should pilot jointly-funded security positions, shared analysts, shared training programmes, and pooled specialist expertise in resource-limited contexts.

Strengthen practical UN-NGO collaboration

- NGOs, UN agencies, and coordination mechanisms should normalise joint analysis, contingency planning, evacuation planning, training, and preparedness activities at country level.
- Expand practical implementation of Saving Lives Together (SLT) and other mechanisms that facilitate operational cooperation by capturing and sharing good practice, and promote the consistent inclusion of national and local NGOs in SLT and wider UN-NGO security coordination mechanisms.
- Create more regular opportunities for engagement between NGO forums, UN security actors, and operational organisations outside periods of acute crisis.

Strengthen inclusive and locally-led coordination

- Coordination mechanisms should review governance and participation arrangements to ensure they engage the full range of actors influencing security outcomes, including volunteer networks, community-based organisations, local civil society groups, and other local actors, with meaningful involvement in priority-setting and analysis, and that arrangements reflect sub-national operational realities rather than being centred solely in capitals.
- Coordination mechanisms should review meeting formats, language, terminology, and communication methods, including translation support and in-person formats where appropriate, to ensure coordination is accessible and relevant to local organisations.
- Prioritise gender inclusion in security coordination at the local level, with specific attention to the structural, cultural, and logistical barriers facing women.
- INGOs should proactively connect local partners to relevant security coordination mechanisms rather than assuming they are aware of or able to access them independently.

Adapt coordination to restrictive environments

- Operational organisations and coordination mechanisms should develop guidance and practical support for integrating informal, unregistered, and volunteer-led local actors into security coordination, recognising that risk is often carried by those furthest from formal structures. Promote smaller, informal coordination structures as complement to formal platforms
- Operational organisations and coordination mechanisms should develop context-sensitive information-sharing protocols that distinguish between information that can be shared openly, bilaterally, or only on a strict need-to-know basis.

Improve visibility and coherence across the security ecosystem

- Develop a regularly updated map of security initiatives, support services, coordination mechanisms, analysis providers, and collaborative models to improve visibility of the wider security ecosystem. (GISF)
- Improve visibility of successful collaborative models and enabling services to support learning and replication. (GISF)
- Strengthen the sustainability of security coordination functions by embedding them within response architecture and funding models rather than relying on short-term funding.
- Develop evidence demonstrating the operational value and return on investment of coordination services and enabling functions. (GISF)

For commercial service providers

Expand access to specialist services across the wider sector

- Create mechanisms for NGOs to pool resources and share costs of private-sector services, including pooled purchasing, framework agreements, subscription models, and other collective access arrangements, to reduce the financial barriers that currently limit access for smaller and national organisations.
- GISF should develop brokerage functions that help organisations identify, access, and procure specialist services more efficiently.
- Commercial suppliers should design service packages specifically for NGO forums, local NGO networks, and collaborative initiatives.

Strengthen trust and transparency in private-sector engagement

- Develop a shared vetting and quality assurance mechanism, including a voluntary code of conduct or recognised quality mark to help NGOs identify reputable, value-aligned providers and reduce over-reliance on informal referrals.
- Promote good practice and lessons learned from existing private-sector partnerships, including case studies on digital tools, training platforms and guard services, to increase sector-wide confidence and uptake.
- Explore potential for a shared feedback and ratings platform allowing organisations to review and assess providers based on direct experience.

Design products and services around humanitarian operating realities

- Create and encourage regular opportunities for service providers to hear from their customers regarding evolving needs, outside of procurement periods. (GISF)
- Consider operational constraints such as connectivity, language, procurement requirements, staffing limitations, and resource constraints during product development.
- Contribute specialist expertise to collective initiatives, research, communities of practice, and collaborative security efforts to strengthen mutual understanding of emerging risks.





Delegates speak with commercial partners exhibiting at the Conference

For Funders and the Policy Space

Create funding models that support both organisational capacity and collective security approaches

- Encourage more flexible and protected security budget lines that can be adapted to changing operational risks, and consider widening the definition of 'security' to support local approaches to risk management.
- Create funding pathways for shared services, collective security initiatives, coordination mechanisms, and other capabilities that generate benefits across multiple organisations.

Increase actionable understanding of the security ecosystem

- Support efforts to map security coordination mechanisms, support services, collective initiatives, and enabling infrastructure, and who funds what. (GISF)
- Improve internal knowledge and alignment across different departments within donor agencies regarding support for the protection of aid workers.

Strengthen donor coordination and strategic engagement on security risk management

- Build on emerging donor working groups and coordination efforts focused on security risk management, ensuring they retain a focus on practical measures in parallel with efforts to support IHL.
- Continue to be informed by regular engagement with operational organisations, NGO networks, and security practitioners to better understand evolving risks, operational realities, and collective security initiatives.

Sustain political leadership on aid worker protection and enabling environments

- Use diplomatic engagement and political influence to address restrictions on civil society, shrinking civic space, and barriers to humanitarian access and coordination.





From the panel discussion 'Stronger UN-NGO Engagement Post-Humanitarian Reset/UN80 Initiative'

4. PROCEEDINGS

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Delegates speak with exhibitors



Delegates during a panel discussion

Special Session: Group of Friends for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel



Lotti Douglas
Humanitarian Advisor
UK FCDO



Suzanne Griffiths
Counsellor, Humanitarian
Australian Permanent Mission to the UN



Jon Novakovic
Executive Director
GISF

In 2025, a cross-regional group of states led by Australia launched the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel. Over 100 states have signed the Declaration in support, and a Group of Friends (GoF) was established to promote implementation of the Declaration. The GoF is a platform for coordinating advocacy and exchanging good practices amongst member states and with the humanitarian sector.



Suzanne Griffiths delivers a presentation on the Declaration



Speakers during the session Q&A

This session, led by Australia and the GoF Secretariat, invited NGO security professionals and the wider community to a dialogue on tangible next steps.

To begin, Suzanne Griffiths from the Australian Permanent Mission to the UN delivered a presentation on the Declaration. She provided context behind the development of the declaration, and the four key pillars upon which it is based:

- Respect for and adherence to international humanitarian law;
- Safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access;
- Alignment of protections for local, national and international personnel; and
- Accountability and justice in response to incidents.

Lotti Douglas (UK FCDO) also spoke to the audience about the progress made on the implementation of the declaration so far, and what its future looks like.

Opening Remarks - Jon Novakovic, GISF

Twenty years after GISF was established, Executive Director Jon Novakovic opened the Conference by returning to the idea on which the organisation was founded: that NGOs can better protect their staff when they work together, pooling knowledge, resources and expertise.

That principle remains highly relevant in a security environment that is becoming more complex. Emerging technologies, declining respect for international humanitarian law, shrinking civic space, a contested information environment, and the growing impacts of climate change are creating new and interconnected risks for humanitarian organisations.

The opening remarks emphasised the need to understand these threats as they are and focus on practical responses. Effective security risk management requires understanding how threats are evolving, how different actors operate and how decisions are made, including where this requires difficult or uncomfortable conversations.

> No one person and no one organisation has the whole answer. But each of you does have part of the answer. Part of the solution.



Jon Novakovic welcomes delegates

Collaboration was positioned as central to that response. While NGOs have a long history of sharing information and supporting one another, the scale and complexity of emerging threats increasingly requires stronger relationships across the wider ecosystem, including with the UN, donors and private-sector actors. Moving beyond intermittent engagement towards shared knowledge, resources, and infrastructure can increase impact, reduce costs, and build trust.

Emerging work on collective approaches to NGO insurance was highlighted as one example of how risks currently carried individually might instead be addressed collectively.

The remarks closed with an invitation to delegates to "grasp the thistle": to speak honestly, have difficult conversations, identify opportunities and develop practical collective responses to the threats facing the sector.

Keynote Address - Dr. Rurik Marsden, UK FCDO

Dr Rurik Marsden, Deputy Director, Humanitarian Policy and Partnerships, at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, opened his keynote by reflecting on the central challenge facing humanitarian organisations: keeping colleagues safe while enabling people in need to continue accessing lifesaving assistance.

He described a rapidly changing operating environment shaped by geopolitical competition, climate risks, targeted attacks, detention, and disinformation, alongside rapidly evolving technologies and shrinking resources. These risks increasingly cut across established organisational boundaries, while local colleagues and partners often face the greatest exposure.

A central theme of the keynote was that no single organisation, agency, donor, or government has the full picture or all the tools needed to respond. Fragmented approaches risk creating duplication in some areas and gaps in others, leaving frontline teams to navigate the consequences. Collaboration therefore needs to move from being desirable to becoming a core part of how the sector manages risk.

> When trust breaks, security doesn't just get harder, it gets more expensive, and it gets more dangerous.



Rurik Marsden delivers his keynote address

Trust was identified as fundamental to this shift: both the long-term trust needed to understand complex operating environments and the trust required for organisations to share information, expertise, and resources.

The keynote also emphasised the role of governments in using diplomatic and political influence to support humanitarian access, uphold international humanitarian law, and strengthen protection for aid workers. Particular attention was given to locally-led response: international actors should recognise local expertise while using their own influence, access, and convening power where risks cannot or should not be carried locally.

Looking ahead, the keynote called for earlier sharing of emerging risks, more genuine partnerships, and collective approaches that avoid shifting risk downwards.

Navigating the New Security Landscape: Emerging threats, shrinking civic space and shared risks



Moderated by

Pauline Chetcuti
Head of Humanitarian Campaigns and Advocacy, Oxfam International
President, VOICE EU



Ali El Mokdad
Safety and Security Manager
Lebanese Red Cross



Alina Shemediuk
Co-Founder/Executive Director
Spravzhni



Horia Mosadiq
Executive Director
Afghanistan Human Rights Coordination Mechanism



Abbas Sheikh
Executive Director
Nexus Consortium Somalia

This session examined the impacts of emerging threats on increasingly restrictive operating environments, and how organisations navigate this new reality whilst maintaining both operational effectiveness and duty of care.

The discussion highlighted the growing complexity and convergence of threats, including the increased use of drones, digitally enabled smear campaigns, restrictions on civil society, and increasingly repressive operating



Panellists answer questions from the audience

> Humanitarian organisations like us often have restrictions on using anti-drone protection measures.

environments. These developments are requiring organisations to adapt established approaches to security risk management, communications, and acceptance.

Experiences from different operational contexts demonstrated how these challenges manifest in practice. Discussions explored how organisations are balancing duty of care with the need to maintain operations in Ukraine; the continued importance of acceptance and community trust in Somalia; and the challenges facing civil society organisations operating under severe restrictions in Afghanistan. The session also examined approaches to deconfliction and coordination

in Lebanon and the implications of new technologies for organisational communications.

A recurring theme was the human impact of these changing risks. Staff operating within their own communities can face a particularly significant psychological burden when colleagues, family, and friends are exposed to the same threats. The discussion reinforced the need for security approaches that account not only for changing operational threats, but also for their cumulative impact on staff wellbeing.



Ali El Mokdad speaks about his experiences

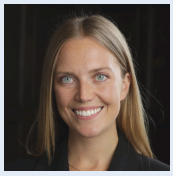
Why We're Safer Together: Opportunities for collaboration in security risk management



Moderated by
Garth Smith
Head of Resilience Delivery
British Red Cross



Anne-Céline Okonta
Director for Security, Safety and Humanitarian Access
Action contre la Faim



Isabelle Persson
Senior Manager (Strategic and Commercial Partnerships)
Start Network



Jamie Williamson
Executive Director
International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA)



Mila Leonova
Director
Alliance UA CSO

> Complexity is the crux of what we are dealing with [...] at the moment.

This session explored what security collaboration looks like in practice, together with the tangible benefits it delivers. The session also examined common barriers to closer collaboration and strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

Participants highlighted growing opportunities to share resources, expertise, and systems, particularly as organisations face increasing operational complexity alongside constrained resources. Examples discussed included pooled funding and shared services, joint preparedness and information-sharing arrangements, and collaborative approaches to strengthening duty of care.



Mila Leonova shares her perspectives

Experiences from Ukraine illustrated the value of rapid information sharing and locally-led approaches in fast-changing environments. The discussion also highlighted minimum duty of care packages as one way of establishing common expectations for staff and volunteer protection, including measures such as insurance, psychosocial support, personal protective equipment, first aid provision, and basic security risk management training.

At the same time, participants identified practical and structural barriers to collaboration. These included differences in

> Restrictions are often addressed in silos, or not addressed at all.

organisational risk appetite and community acceptance, uncertainty over participation in coordination mechanisms, dependence on individual relationships, and concerns around pooling resources or information. Collaboration with commercial actors also raised questions around standards, accountability and how organisations identify trusted providers.

Panellists also shared the imperative to design collaborative programmes as locally-led from the outset, alongside the need for structural changes around resourcing and risk sharing.

The session ended with questions from the floor, and a re-iteration from the panel for humanitarian leaders to proactively embrace a collective approach and address structural barriers to equitable risk sharing.



Panellists speak to their experiences

Stronger UN-NGO Engagement Post-Humanitarian Reset/UN80 Initiative



Moderated by

Reshma K Adatia
Director of Engagement
ICVA

Presentation by



Gilles Michaud
Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security
UNDSS



Abdul Haq Amiri
Senior Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Crisis Response Division
OCHA



Elisabeth Sancery
Chief of Policy and Partnership, Security Division
World Food Programme



Marieke van Weerden
Senior Director, Health, Safety and Security
Catholic Relief Services



Neil Elliot
Global Head of Security
Oxfam International



William Blanchard
Director of Field Operations
UNDSS



Reshma Adatia introduces the session

This session examined how changes across the humanitarian system, including significant financial pressures and restructuring within the UN, are affecting security coordination between UN agencies and NGOs.

The session kicked off with a presentation from Gilles Michaud, Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security at UNDSS. Against a backdrop of significant budget reductions across the UN system and declining respect for international humanitarian law, he outlined efforts to sustain core capabilities, including analysis and surge capacity, while increasing the use of multi-country structures and developing new partnerships. He also pointed to contexts where sustained investment from donors and Member States has enabled security support to be maintained despite wider pressures.



Gilles Michaud addresses the audience

> Coordination remains extremely complicated [because of] the number of actors, vested interests, and donor pressures.

The wider discussion considered how these institutional changes intersect with a humanitarian operating environment characterised by the politicisation of aid, erosion of established norms and principles, declining acceptance, and increasing security incidents affecting humanitarian operations and the communities they serve. The financial shock facing the sector adds another dimension, increasing pressure to make better use of existing capacities and strengthening the case for more locally-led approaches and greater trust between organisations.

Participants also reflected on how the relationship between the UN and NGOs has evolved. NGO security capacity has developed considerably over the past two decades, challenging assumptions about where expertise, information, and decision-making authority sit within the humanitarian system. In an increasingly fragmented operating environment, effective security coordination requires recognising the complementary capacities of UN agencies and NGOs.



Marieke van Weerden discusses her experience



Bill Blanchard speaks on the panel

Much of the discussion focused on practical cooperation. Joint contingency planning, risk assessment, preparedness, and information sharing were highlighted as areas where organisations can combine their respective capacities. Examples from Ethiopia and Sudan demonstrated the value of bringing different actors together to plan for deteriorating conditions, assess access options, and identify practical measures before a crisis escalates.

Saving Lives Together was discussed as an existing framework through which this cooperation can be strengthened, alongside a broader need for formal and informal relationships that support regular dialogue and trust-building. Rather than creating additional coordination structures, the discussion highlighted the importance of making existing mechanisms more practical, accessible, and responsive to operational needs.

> “Collaboration is not a nice-to-have, it is a need-to-have at this juncture.

Participants also considered how security can be better integrated into humanitarian planning and financing, including how organisations with particular capacities or access might support others where direct presence is constrained. Post-incident support remains uneven, particularly given financial pressures and varying access to insurance, psychosocial support, and other forms of staff assistance.

Overall, the session reinforced that stronger UN–NGO security engagement will depend on recognising complementary capacities, building trust, and translating coordination into practical arrangements for preparedness, access, and incident response.



Neil Elliot shares his perspective

Donor Perspectives: Supporting security as a collective good



Moderated by

Alyssa Thurston
Head of Policy and Engagement
GISF



Colm Byrne
Deputy Director of the Civil Society Unit
Irish DFA



Katrine Thomsen
Security Policy Officer
DG ECHO



Lotti Douglas
Humanitarian Advisor
UK FCDO



Luuk van de Vondervoort
Adviser
Netherlands Advisory Council for International Affairs



Suzanne Griffiths
Counsellor, Humanitarian
Australian Permanent Mission to the UN

This session brought together donor representatives to provide insights into their priorities for collective security initiatives, coordination support and achieving value for money. The discussion explored the role of donors in supporting collective security initiatives, coordination mechanisms, and infrastructure that can benefit multiple organisations.



Alyssa Thurston introduces the discussion

The conversation reflected growing donor attention to aid worker protection and security risk management. Recent developments include new policy commitments, targeted investment in security initiatives, increased support costs for local partners and efforts to strengthen accountability for violence against aid workers. Participants nevertheless emphasised the need to maintain momentum and ensure that policy commitments translate into practical support for organisations managing security risks.

A recurring theme was the potential for donors to take a more collective and systemic approach to security. Participants highlighted the value of stronger coordination between donors and greater visibility of the initiatives and services already being supported across the sector. Mapping existing investments could help identify gaps, reduce duplication and inform decisions about where collective approaches, shared services, or security infrastructure could have the greatest impact.



Colm Byrne provides his perspective

The discussion also highlighted the importance of demonstrating the operational value of security investment. As pressure on humanitarian budgets increases, organisations need to communicate more clearly how security resourcing contributes to safe access, programme continuity, and effective delivery. Regular dialogue between donors and operational organisations was seen as important to ensuring that funding approaches reflect changing risks and operational realities.

Participants also considered how funding structures can better support security without creating unintended barriers. This included incorporating security into pooled funding mechanisms and avoiding a "race to the bottom" in which organisations reduce security costs to remain competitive. At the same time, increasing compliance requirements can disadvantage smaller organisations or those operating in particularly restrictive environments, highlighting the need to balance appropriate standards with flexibility.

> "It is not unfair that states assume risk as well.

The challenges facing local and national organisations operating without formal registration were also discussed. Partnerships between registered and unregistered actors were identified as one potential route for extending funding and support, alongside wider diplomatic efforts to protect humanitarian access and civic space.

Overall, the session reflected growing recognition that security should be understood not simply as an organisational cost, but as an enabling investment that supports humanitarian access and delivery. Greater donor coordination, flexible funding, and stronger evidence of impact can help ensure that limited resources strengthen security across the wider humanitarian system.



Panellists share their thoughts

Breakout Session 1. Strengthening Security Support in Restricted Operational Contexts



Moderated by

Victoria Andrews
Technical SRM Adviser
GISF



Anika Krstic
Country Director Central Sahel (Niger / Burkina Faso)
Norwegian Refugee Council



Anthony Neal
Director Policy, Advocacy and Communications
INSO



Marianna Romero
General Director
Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia

Focusing on restricted operational environments and "politically estranged" settings - where access, operational space, and trust with authorities have eroded - this session examined practical modalities for security coordination, information sharing, and incident support when physical presence or direct engagement is limited.

The session began with presentations from each of the panellists, who provided contextual information on each of their operating environments. We learned about increases in criminalisation, stigmatisation, and restrictive operating requirements.



Anika Krstic delivers a presentation remotely

Panellists stressed the need for information sharing to be purposeful and reciprocal, ensuring that it leads to positive security outcomes.

Panellists also highlighted the tensions between localisation and the need for international support, alongside striking the right balance between vocal advocacy and keeping a low profile when needed.

Resources such as the IASC Risk Sharing Framework were discussed, and how there needs to be a shift in attitude from dependency (of local actors on INGOs) towards mutual support and contribution.

Feedback from group discussions showed that participants feel that early intervention, clear data management guidelines, and flexible funding arrangements are all vital to continue operating when environments become more restrictive. Participants repeatedly stressed the need for transparency, trust, and mutual respect.

Breakout Session 2. Empowering Local Participation in Security Coordination Platforms



Moderated by
Dimitri Kotsiras
Research & Programmes Manager
GISF



Diletta Salviati
Policy and Research Manager
INSO



Jubril Shittu
Secretariat Director
South Sudan NGO Forum

Drawing on case examples and facilitated discussion, delegates identified practical strategies to strengthen inclusive security coordination for the collective protection of all aid workers. This includes building mutual trust, enhancing information sharing, investing in capacity strengthening, and adapting coordination mechanisms to centre local expertise.

The discussion highlighted that while participation in security coordination has increased, significant barriers remain. Resource constraints, travel requirements, language barriers, lack of invitation, and power dynamics can all limit meaningful engagement. Where coordination mechanisms do not adequately reflect local actors' risks, knowledge, and constraints, they can be less effective for the wider humanitarian community.

A key theme was the need to move beyond participation and towards influence. Simply increasing representation is not enough if local actors remain unable to shape priorities, analysis, and decision-making. Approaches discussed included redesigning coordination spaces, investing in accessibility, and adapting mechanisms to better reflect local and sub-national security realities.

Experiences from South Sudan illustrated some of the practical challenges local NGOs face when participating in security coordination and accessing relevant information. This reinforces the importance of designing platforms around the needs and realities of those operating closest to affected communities.

Participants then considered how their own organisations can support engagement by local partners, the barriers that continue to limit participation, and what changes are needed across the wider sector. The discussion reinforced that more inclusive coordination is not only about representation: local expertise and meaningful participation can strengthen the quality and relevance of collective security analysis and decision-making.



Groups discuss key questions

Breakout Session 3. Private-sector Partnerships in Strengthening Security Risk Management



Moderated by
Jon Novakovic
Executive Director
GISF



Andrew McInerney
Chief Executive Officer
Track24



Colin McIlreavy
Chief Safety and Security Officer
International Rescue Committee



Kayle Giroud
Head of European Affairs
CyberPeace Institute

This session examined the role of private-sector engagement in strengthening security risk management, from ad hoc cooperation to longer-term partnerships. Participants explored the benefits and challenges of existing partnerships and what is needed to make collaboration more effective.

The discussion highlighted the importance of trust and longstanding relationships, alongside practical barriers such as complex procurement processes. Alignment in values was also an important consideration, particularly where partnerships could affect perceptions of an organisation's neutrality or impartiality.



Jon Novakovic introduces the panel

Participants highlighted the restrictive effects of complicated procurement processes, the importance of trusted networks and longstanding relationships, and how value alignment is a vital consideration for some of their organisations. There are also considerations around image, and the potential risks to an NGO that might arise following a partnership that is perceived unfavourably.

Panellists from the commercial sector described some of their strategies for building trust with NGOs, including NGOs having the autonomy to turn down volunteers that they aren't confident in, and dealing with uneasy NGO partners in-house. They stressed the need for NGOs to communicate their needs so that they can be better addressed, the immense power of collective bargaining, and the valuable insights that NGOs bring to their product development.

Thank you!

Thank you for attending the GISF 2026 Global Security Risk and Policy Conference.

We look forward to seeing you again next time.

The Global Interagency Security Forum

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