HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Security and Risk Management: protecting teams and maintaining access

Course handout · Week 2 : Analysing the context: actors, dynamics and trends in violence

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to manage the security and risks of a humanitarian organisation: duty of care, context analysis, risk assessment, plans and procedures, acceptance and access negotiation, incidents, crisis management and kidnapping, staff health and wellbeing, digital security and data protection, organisational risks and compliance, risk sharing with partners, governance and business continuity. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-securite-risques/semaine-2/

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Week 2 : Analysing the context: actors, dynamics and trends in violence

Objectives

- Conduct a structured context analysis (political, economic, social, security) that is useful for decision-making.
- Map actors according to their influence, their interests and their attitude towards the organisation.
- Read incident data (frequencies, rates, trends) without misinterpretation, and produce early warning indicators.

Why analyse the context

All security decisions rest on an understanding of the context. A weak analysis produces two symmetrical errors: **underestimating** a threat (and exposing staff) or **overestimating** it (and abandoning populations who could have been helped).

A good analysis answers a few questions: who controls the territory and the roads? What are the actors' interests, and how does humanitarian action affect them? What types of violence exist, against whom, where, when and why? What is changing?

Sources: national staff (the first source, often the most nuanced), communities, authorities, other organisations, NGO security coordination forums, the United Nations (UNDSS), local media, social media (with caution), public conflict databases. All information is **cross-checked** and rated according to the reliability of the source and the credibility of the information.

Analytical frameworks

Two simple frameworks structure the analysis:

- **Adapted PESTEL**: political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal, to which security is added (armed groups, crime, security forces).
- **Historical analysis**: a timeline of major events over recent years, to identify cycles (fighting seasons, election periods, harvests, transhumance).

The analysis leads to **scenarios**: the most likely, the most dangerous, and possibly an improvement scenario, each with observable **indicators** that signal it is approaching.

Example of indicators. Scenario "resumption of fighting around the town": families moving south, closure of weekly markets, sudden rise in fuel prices, departure of foreign traders, reported troop movements, hostile rhetoric on local radio stations. Three out of six indicators observed trigger a crisis meeting and a review of the security level.

Mapping actors

Actor mapping lists those who can influence security and access: national and local authorities, armed forces and police, non-state armed groups, traditional and religious leaders, militias, criminal networks, traders, media, host and displaced communities, other organisations.

For each: **influence** (low to high), **attitude** towards the organisation (hostile, neutral, favourable), **interests** and current **relationship**.

Actor	Influence	Attitude	Action
Leader of the main militia	High	Neutral, suspicious	Regular dialogue through an accepted intermediary; explain the principles and the targeting criteria
Prefect	High	Favourable	Regular information, compliance with administrative procedures
Unemployed young people in the town	Medium	Hostile (recruitment seen as unfair)	Transparent recruitment, complaints mechanism, fair daily-labour jobs

> A hostile actor with high influence is a priority for the analysis and for the acceptance strategy, not just a threat to be avoided.

Reading incident data

Incident data help to objectify the threat, provided they are read correctly:

- **Raw frequency**: number of incidents per period.
- **Rate**: incidents relative to exposure (number of staff, trips, person-days). Without a denominator, an increase may simply reflect an increase in activity.
- **Reporting bias**: an increase may come from better reporting, not from a deterioration.
- **Typology**: the same total can hide a fall in thefts and a rise in kidnappings, which are far more serious.

Example. Year 1: 24 incidents for 300 staff. Year 2: 36 incidents for 600 staff. Rates: 8 versus 6 incidents per 100 staff per year. Despite a raw increase of 50%, the rate has fallen by 25%. But if serious incidents (violence against people) go from 3 to 9, their rate goes from 1 to 1.5 per 100 staff: severity is increasing. The reading combines rate and severity.

Understanding violence against aid workers

Attacks on aid workers follow several logics, which must be distinguished because they call for different responses:

- **Criminal**: financial gain (thefts, robberies, kidnappings for ransom). Protection measures and discretion about valuables are effective.

- **Political or military**: the organisation is perceived as an ally of one side, or its action disrupts a strategy. Acceptance, perceived neutrality and communication are central.
- **Linked to the work itself**: targeting disputes, contested recruitment, dismissals, unaddressed complaints. Programme quality and accountability are security measures.
- **Incidental**: being in the wrong place at the wrong time (crossfire, shelling, mines). Analysis of areas and timings, movement procedures.

Many serious incidents affecting NGOs are linked to **internal or neighbourhood tensions** (dismissed staff member, rejected supplier, excluded beneficiary): security analysis must also look at the organisation itself.

Producing a useful analysis

A useful analysis fits on **two pages**, is updated regularly (monthly in an unstable context, after any major event), and ends with concrete implications:

- areas and roads that are accessible, accessible under conditions, or off-limits;
- travel times and modes of transport;
- actors to meet and key messages;
- indicators to monitor and review thresholds;
- consequences for programmes (timetable, modalities, remote management).

It is shared with the people who need it, while respecting **confidentiality**: an analysis that names armed actors or informants can put people in danger if it circulates. Nor should it use confidential information from other organisations without their explicit agreement.

Exercise: a changing town

Situation. An NGO has been working for 3 years in a garrison town. Data: year 1, 18 incidents for 150 staff (including 2 against people); year 2, 27 incidents for 300 staff (including 6 against people). Over the past month: a local candidate who was not recruited has publicly threatened the organisation; two weekly markets have closed; rents are falling as well-off families leave; a local radio station accuses "the NGOs" of helping the rebels; the NGO security forum reports troop movements.

Task. 1) Calculate and interpret the incident rates. 2) Classify the signals by logic of violence. 3) Propose three practical implications.

Answer. 1) Overall rate: 12 then 9 incidents per 100 staff (a fall of 25%). Rate of incidents against people: 1.33 then 2 per 100 staff (a rise of 50%). The situation is getting worse in severity despite the fall in the overall rate. 2) Threat from the unsuccessful candidate: work-related logic; radio accusations: political logic (perception of partiality); closed markets, departures, troop movements: indicators of a scenario of renewed fighting (incidental and political risk). 3) Address the recruitment complaint (formal mechanism, transparency, security of HR staff); launch an acceptance effort (meetings with authorities and leaders, a radio programme on principles and aid criteria); review the scenario and the security level, and prepare relocation and remote management if the military indicators are confirmed.

Key takeaways

- A weak analysis underestimates or overestimates; cross-check and rate source reliability and credibility.
- Scenarios with observable indicators and thresholds that trigger a review.
- Map actors' influence, attitude and interests; prioritise influential hostile actors.
- Always use a denominator: incident rates per exposure, read together with severity.
- Many serious incidents have a work-related origin: programme quality is a security measure.

Quiz

1. 30 incidents for 500 staff. The rate per 100 staff is:
   A. 30
   B. 16.7
   C. 6
   D. 0.6

2. Incidents go from 20 to 30 while staff numbers go from 200 to 400. The rate:
   A. Rises by 50%
   B. Falls by 25%
   C. Remains stable
   D. Doubles

3. A badly handled dismissal followed by threats is mainly a form of violence:
   A. Linked to the organisation's work
   B. Incidental
   C. Criminal
   D. Military

4. A security analysis that names informants must:
   A. Be published for transparency
   B. Be shared with all partners
   C. Be sent to the media
   D. Circulate on a strictly restricted basis so as not to put them in danger

5. A hostile and highly influential actor must be:
   A. Ignored
   B. Reported to the press
   C. A priority for the analysis and the acceptance strategy
   D. Bypassed without ever being contacted

Quiz answers : 1. C · 2. B · 3. A · 4. D · 5. C