

Security Facts for Humanitarian Aid Agencies

Comparing Urban and Rural Security Incidents

Christina Wille & Larissa Fast

How do security events affecting humanitarian agencies differ between urban and rural environments?

Is it more dangerous for aid agencies to operate in urban or non-urban environments? What are the characteristics of typical events that happen in densely populated places and those that occur in small towns and villages? To help agencies anticipate what kind of events may affect their staff or their operations depending on where they work, Insecurity Insight used its Security in Numbers Database (SiND) to analyse and describe differences in the patterns of events that occur in places with more than 100,000 inhabitants (urban), and in places with fewer than 100,000 people living closely together (rural) using the 963 security events in the database. The description of the “six Ws” - who did what, to whom, where, when and with what weapon – are compiled from aid agency reports (56.8% of the total reports) and collected from media and other public sources over a period of 24 months, between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2010.

The European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) identified the issue of differences in security contexts, and specifically the differences between urban and rural environments, as the subject of its bi-annual meeting in September 2010. EISF asked Insecurity Insight to provide an analysis of these environments using the SiND data. Christina Wille and Larissa Fast thank Oliver Behn and Madeleine Kingston for their valuable input in the preparation of this paper.

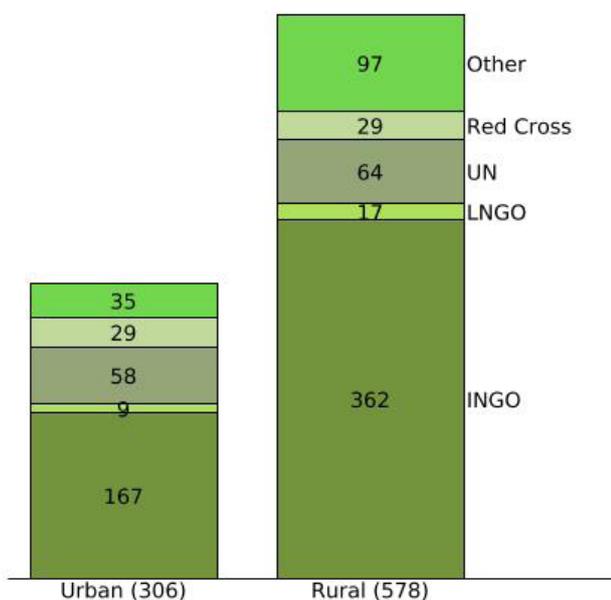
Are rural environments more dangerous for INGOs than urban settlements?

Aid agencies report more security events from rural areas than urban centres. As of 30 June 2010, the SiND contained 306 urban and 578 rural events (Graph 1). The nature of humanitarian aid delivery, which tends to focus more on operations in rural rather than urban areas, may explain the difference in number of events per category. Unfortunately, there are no data on the location of all aid operations carried out that are sufficiently disaggregated by urban and rural locations, which would permit an assessment of the relative danger of rural and urban environments. However, it is possible to compare the characteristics of security events in urban and rural locations in order to gain insight into the nature of risk and threats in these different localities.

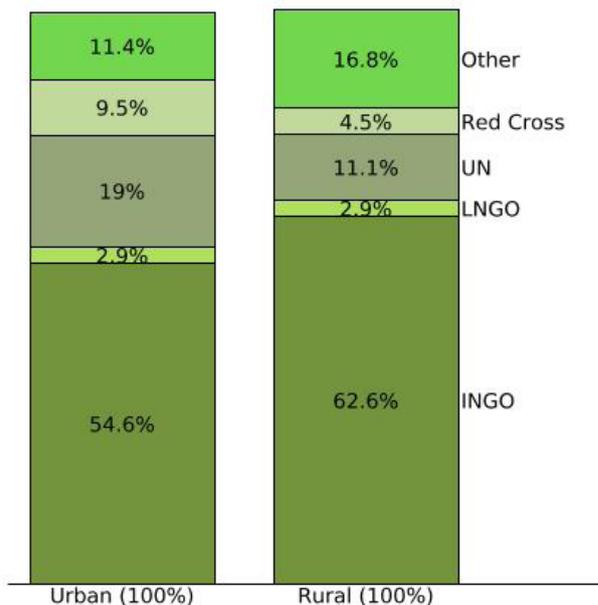
Graphs 1 and 2 highlight the extent to which different aid providers were affected in urban and rural areas. In our sample, international NGOs (INGOs) reported the highest number of incidents followed by UN agencies. This should not be taken as an indicator that INGOs are particularly at risk, because the possibility that INGOs operate more programmes, or that INGOs are more likely to report security events could both explain the finding. In the face of this uncertainty we do not

seek to draw conclusions about the absolute level of risk faced by different organisations in rural and urban areas. It is possible, however, to draw conclusions based on differences in proportions observed between rural and urban areas. Such an approach assumes that the aid agencies that provide reports to this database do not treat urban and rural events differently when they make decisions of whether to submit information about an incident.

Graph 1
Total number of recorded security events in urban and rural environments



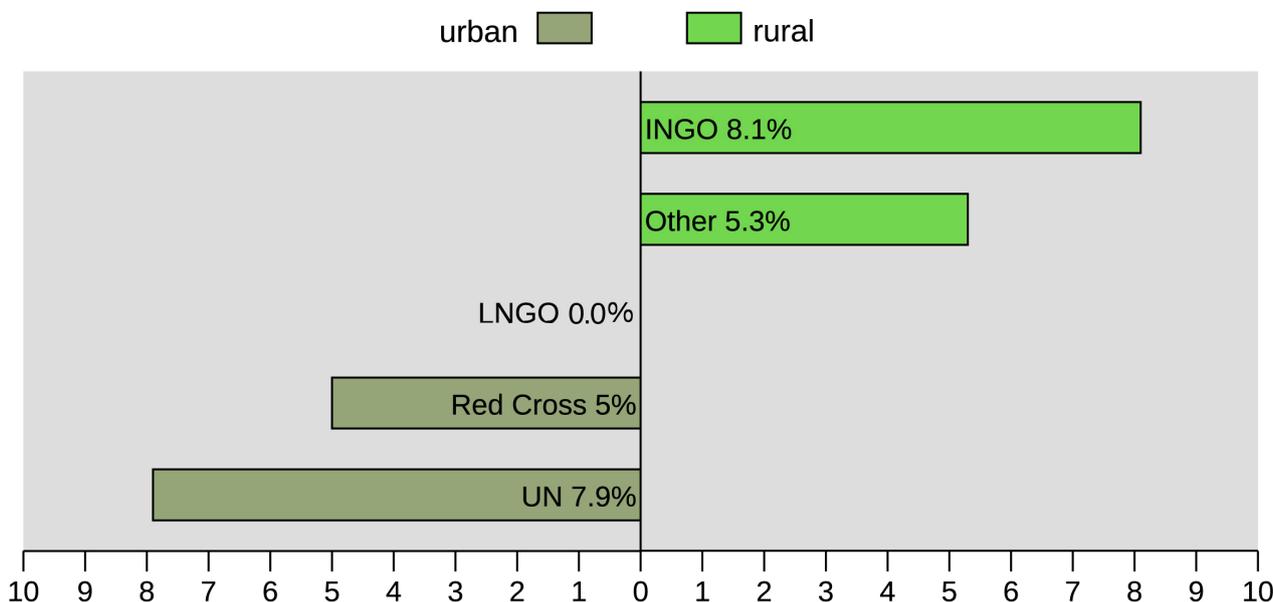
Graph 2
Proportion (measured in percent) of affected aid providers in urban and rural environments



Graph 3
Types of aid providers and the differences in vulnerability in rural and urban environments

Bars on the left indicate security events that occur proportionally more frequently in urban areas

Bars on the right indicate security events that occur proportionally more frequently in rural areas



Graph 3 shows Insecurity Insight's approach to security event analysis in the face of incomplete data. The chart shows the **difference** between the **proportion** of aid providers experiencing security events **in relation to the total number of events** in urban and rural areas respectively. For example, INGOs reported 167 of the 306 events from urban areas (54.5%) and 362 of the 578 events from rural areas (62.6%). We would expect this proportion to be the same if the level of risk were the same in both locations. The difference suggests that rural areas are slightly more dangerous for INGOs than urban environments, shown by the fact that 8.1 % more events occurred in urban than in rural areas. UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement appear to face the opposite pattern of risk, where urban environments present a greater danger, because 7.9% and 5% (respectively) fewer events occurred in rural environments. No difference is apparent in the risk levels for Local NGOs (LNGOs) between urban and rural areas.

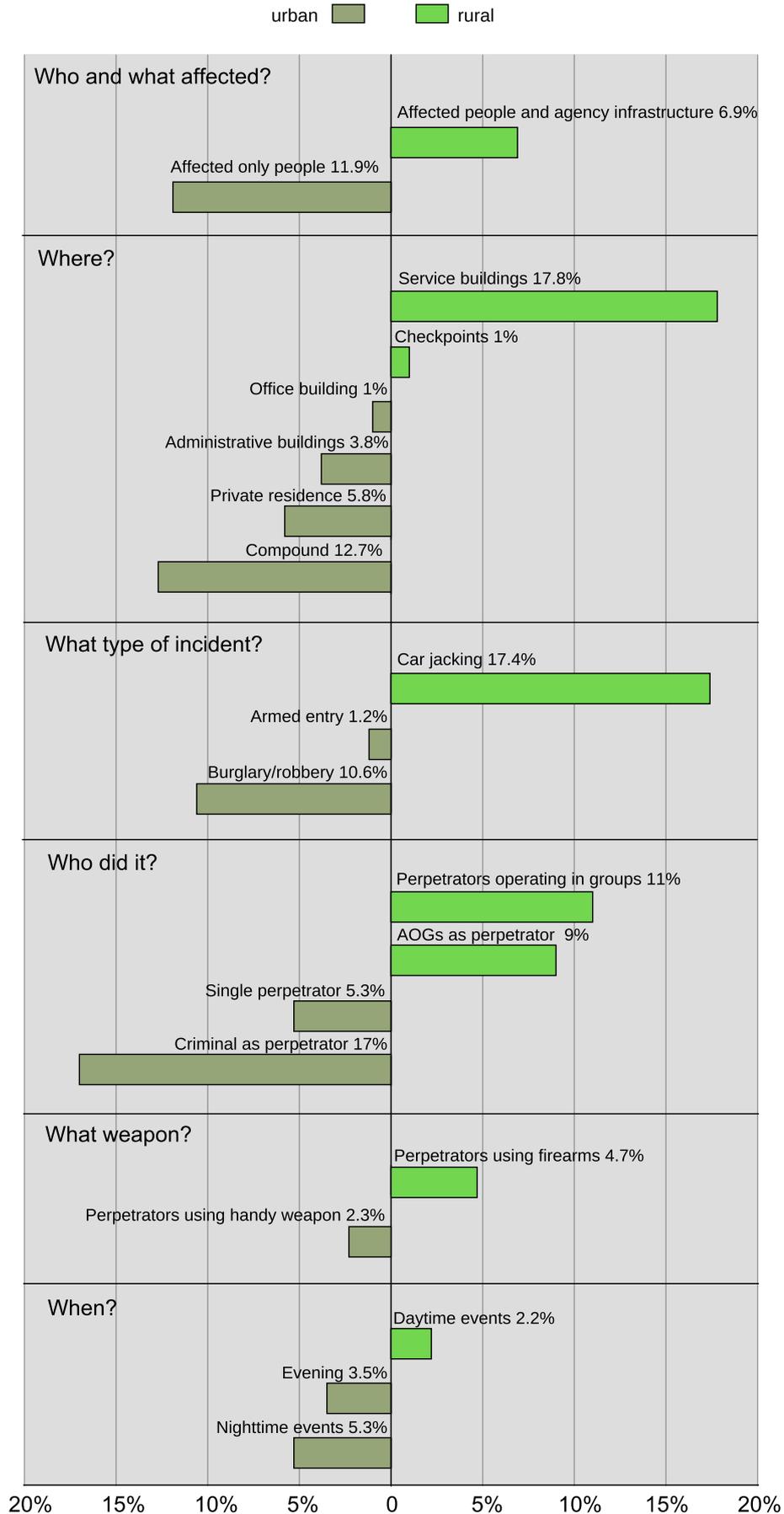
Characteristics of rural security events

What are typical rural security events and how do they differ from incidents that occur in urban centres? **Graph 4** shows the reported differences in the proportion of particular characteristics in urban and rural environments. The findings suggest that aid delivery in rural areas is particularly vulnerable to attacks by armed opposition groups (AOGs), often operating in groups and carrying firearms. Rural events are more likely to happen during the day than at night. Attacks are more frequently directed at service buildings, but less often at administrative buildings or staff residences. Car-jackings are a real danger in rural areas, as are other attacks that occur while staff are travelling in a vehicle.

Characteristics of urban security events

What kind of security events should aid agencies expect in urban environments? In urban areas crime in the form of burglaries and robberies appears more likely than in rural areas. (see **graph 4**) Such events can include armed entry into buildings where staff may be present, such as compounds, private residences and office buildings. Perpetrators can be single individuals who may also use available weapons such as kitchen knives, axes or fire (rather than firearms). Security events occur proportionally most frequently in the evening, followed by night, and are proportionally less during the day. A greater proportion of these events affect only staff with no effect on agency infrastructure. Car-jackings and security events at checkpoints are proportionally much less common in urban areas than in rural ones.

Graph 4 Attacks by armed actors on humanitarian aid agencies



Percentages refer to the difference in the number of security events with specified characteristics in urban and rural environments

What does this mean?

Security events of all types can occur everywhere and agencies need to be prepared. However, the particular characteristics of events do appear to vary between urban and rural areas, in perhaps expected ways. This report provides empirical data to support anecdotal impressions and security management measures that many organizations already have in place. While the analysis does not provide hard and fast rules, it presents a general profile against which to compare to your organization's reported incidents and specific vulnerabilities.

The characteristic of rural events suggest that rural areas in which AOGs are not operating are comparably safer.

- Does this overall profile fit with the reports received in your organization? If not entirely, it might signal the need to look more closely at the particular context. Is the situation different? Does your organization have adequate measures already in place? Is the full picture reported within your organization?
- For those agencies operating programmes in rural environments where AOGs are known to operate, this comparison highlights the particular vulnerabilities for warehouses and other service (as supposed to administrative or residential) buildings, as well as staff movement on open roads. This analysis suggests the need to devote extra attention to security management measures for these situations.

The characteristics of urban events suggest that urban areas are prone to crime, especially burglaries directed at people, compounds and residences during hours of darkness.

- Does this overall profile fit with the reports received in your organization? If not entirely, it might signal the need to look more closely at the particular context. Is the situation different? Does your organization have adequate measures already in place? Is the full picture reported within your organization?
- For agencies implementing programmes in urban areas or with local or regional headquarters in capital cities, this comparison highlights the particular vulnerability for staff and agency assets to crime, and the need to tailor security management to general crime awareness based on the profile of criminal behavior in different urban areas.