

Security Facts for Humanitarian Aid Agencies

Shifting patterns in security incidents affecting humanitarian aid workers and agencies:

An analysis of fifteen years of data (1996-2010)

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Are more employees of international non-governmental organisations (INGO) than international staff members of UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement victims of violence? Have the UN and Red Cross organisations shifted the burden of working in highly insecure places to INGOs? Have INGOs transferred the risk of frontline delivery to their national staff? Has this process affected men and women in the same way? Does the evidence support this commonly held view of a cascading effect of 'risk transfer', or does it point to additional explanations? This fact sheet for humanitarian agencies summarises the key findings from a more detailed report on the shifting patterns of security incidents affecting humanitarian agencies between 1996 and 2010.

Sources of information about the shifting patterns of insecurity

This analysis is based on a sub-set of reported security incidents affecting the delivery of aid held in Insecurity Insight's Security in Numbers Database (SiND). The SiND is a collaborative project between Insecurity Insight and ten humanitarian agencies. It combines detailed information on security incidents from SiND partner INGOs with media-reported data for all humanitarian providers, including the UN and Red Cross organisations. As of 30 September 2012, the database contained 3,177 security events affecting the delivery of aid that date back to the mid-1990s. This analysis uses the sub-set of 747 'severe events' in which at least one staff member was killed, injured or kidnapped between 1996 and 2010. These 747 events affected 2,084 staff members and resulted in 565 deaths, 529 injured, and 896 kidnapped employees. Seventy-three percent of these events are from media reports. To show changes over time, we examine security events in three different five-year time periods: 1996-2000, 2001-2005 and 2006-2010.

The SiND is not a complete dataset of all incidents affecting humanitarian work nor is it a fully representative sample, since the information in the SiND comes from different sources and the composition of sources has changed over time. In fact, a representative or complete database does not exist. As a result, the findings presented here represent only the data included in the SiND. With a large proportion data directly reported by INGOs, we assume we have a bigger sample of INGO events and a smaller sample of UN and Red Cross events in our dataset. Moreover, as the number of contributing agencies has increased over time, we would expect this bias towards

INGO events to be stronger in later time periods than in earlier ones. In addition, advances in new media and communication technologies have made it easier to report and share security events. All of these factors influence the nature of events held in the database and must be taken into consideration when interpreting the data.

Information on the number of nature of security incidents can identify overall patterns but does not explain underlying causes. Any security incident is the consequence of the interplay between an agency's **presence** (and thus exposure to insecurity) and **vulnerability** (influenced by security measures, including acceptance strategies, and individual behaviours) as well as the perpetrator's **capability** (referring to the ability of the perpetrator to take action against an aid agency) and **intention** (which may be indiscriminate or deliberately targeted and driven by various motives). Data on security incidents provide some information on these factors, but not a complete picture. We are therefore limited to providing informed inferences based on observed trends. However, such information is still valuable in improving security policy and protecting the lives of humanitarian workers.

Interpreting the available information to determine changes in who is affected by security events over time

Mindful of the imbalance we expect in the proportions of INGO and UN security incidents within the SiND over time, we first divided our data into three samples of five-year periods. We treat each of the three time periods separately, and only analyse the data in terms of ratios that the type of biases identified above are less likely to affect. For example, changes in the information sources over time affect the absolute number of recorded fatalities from all provider categories (i.e., UN agency, Red Cross agency, INGO). However, the changing sample size is less likely to affect the proportion of fatalities amongst the same category of humanitarian aid provider in two different locations, such as rural and urban environments, or different categories of employees, such as men or women, within each of the three time periods. While this approach does not completely remove the effects of bias, it increases our confidence in the findings. Further information on methodology and assumptions is available in the associated report, '**Operating in Insecurity**', which analyses shifting patterns of insecurity for aid actors over the past fifteen years using the SiND data (Wille and Fast 2013).

In this fact sheet, agencies are categorised as belonging to one of four categories of humanitarian aid provider:

- the Red Cross, including the ICRC, the IFRC, and national societies
- UN agencies, including OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP and other UN agencies
- International NGOs, such as CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision, and others
- Other humanitarian agencies, including government agencies, missionary organisations, military forces, local or national NGOs, local health care providers, private foundations, and unspecified actors providing humanitarian assistance or medical services. (Note: These providers appear only in figures 1 and 2, to help explain the averages for international and national staff fatalities).

Key findings

- The proportion of national staff fatalities has increased over time, particularly during periods of active fighting**

The proportion of national staff among all aid worker fatalities has risen noticeably over the years. National staff members made up 20 percent of reported fatalities during the 1990s, but accounted for 70 percent between 2006-2010 (see figure 2). This is particularly the case during periods of active fighting (defined as events occurring during military engagement between two or more conflict parties, or as a result of shelling or bombardment during a period of intensified violence) where national staff made up 93 percent of all victims, as compared to 71 percent among all aid worker fatalities.

- The trend of increasing victimisation of national staff members is less marked among INGOs than UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement**

Compared to all other humanitarian aid providers, Red Cross organisations have reduced their share of international staff fatalities most visibly. Between 1996 and 2000, half of all Red Cross fatalities were international staff members. Since then this ratio has fallen to three percent (see figure 1). Fatalities among UN agency national staff increased significantly, from 30% during 1996-2000 to 83% between 2006-2010. Among INGOs the number of national staff fatalities has also risen over the years, although it has been lower than the average of 71% for all three time periods (see figure 2). Moreover, for INGOs the proportion of international staff who died has not changed noticeably over the last 15 years (from 14% to 21% to 19% in each of the three respective time periods). The absolute numbers are increasing – more international staff are being killed – but the proportion of international employee victimisation among INGO staff has remained roughly the same, even in some of the most insecure environments.

Figure 1 **International staff fatalities**

Proportion of international staff fatalities among all reported staff deaths (UN agencies, Red Cross, INGOs, and other providers, 1996-2010), compared to the average proportion of fatalities for all international staff among all providers during that period

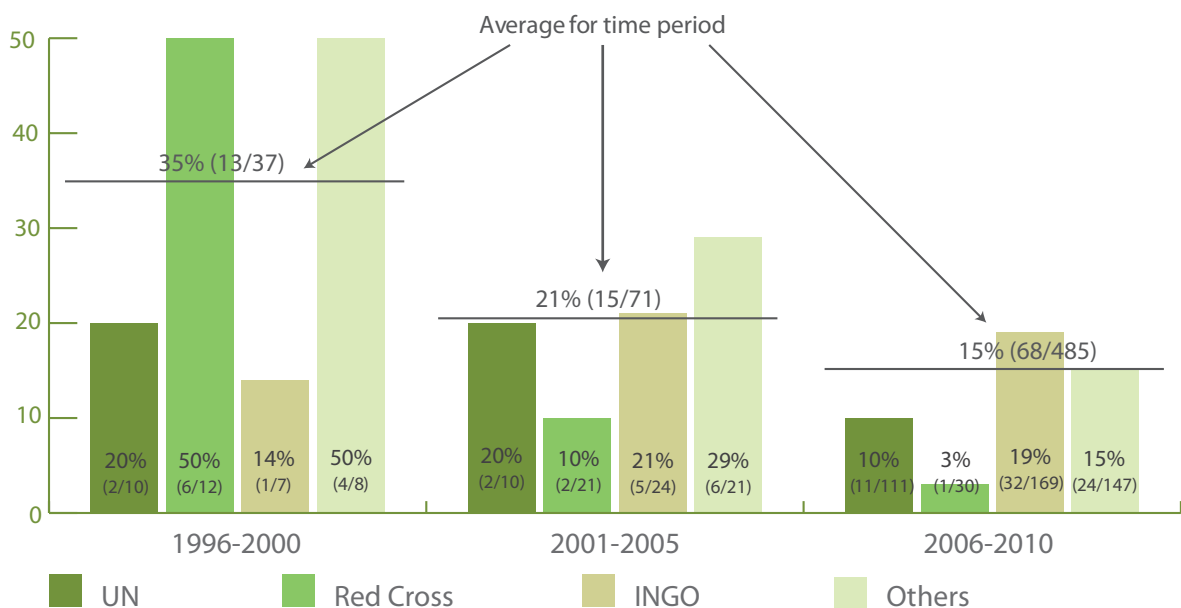
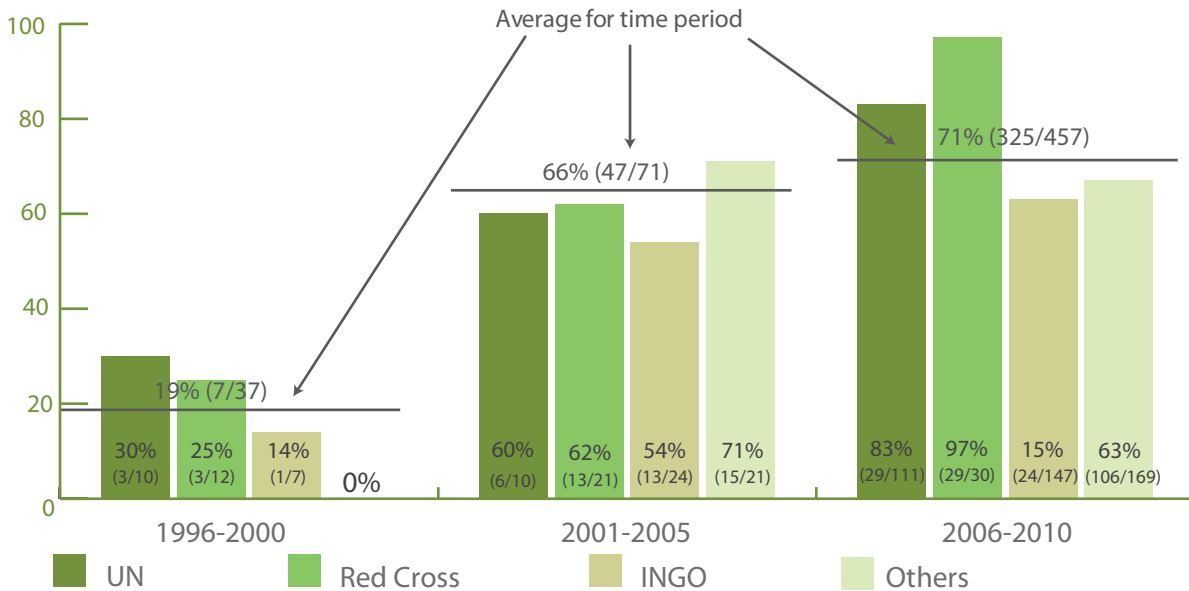


Figure 2 National staff fatalities

Proportion of national staff fatalities among all reported staff deaths (UN agencies, Red Cross, INGOs, and other providers, 1996-2010), compared to the average proportion of fatalities for all national staff among all providers during that period

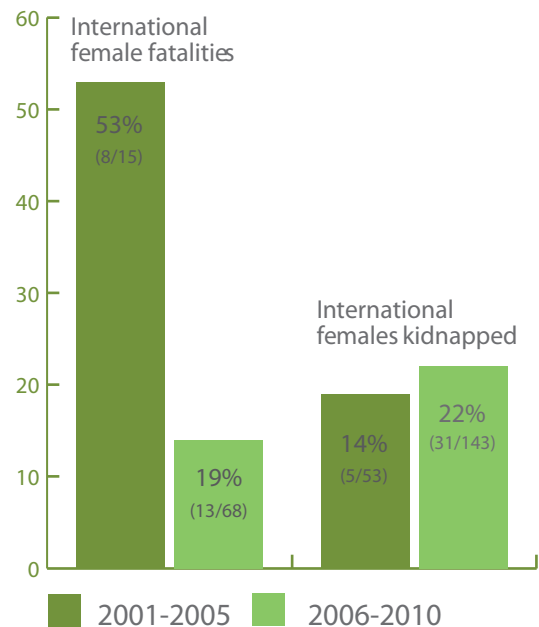


■ **A decreasing proportion of international female staff fatalities among all victims**

The proportion of female international staff fatalities fell over the years (although absolute numbers increase) in relation to all international staff fatalities. In contrast, the proportion of women who were kidnapped remained relatively stable or increased slightly (see figure 3).

Figure 3 International female staff victims

Proportion of international female fatalities and international women kidnapped among all international staff who died or were kidnapped, 2001-2010



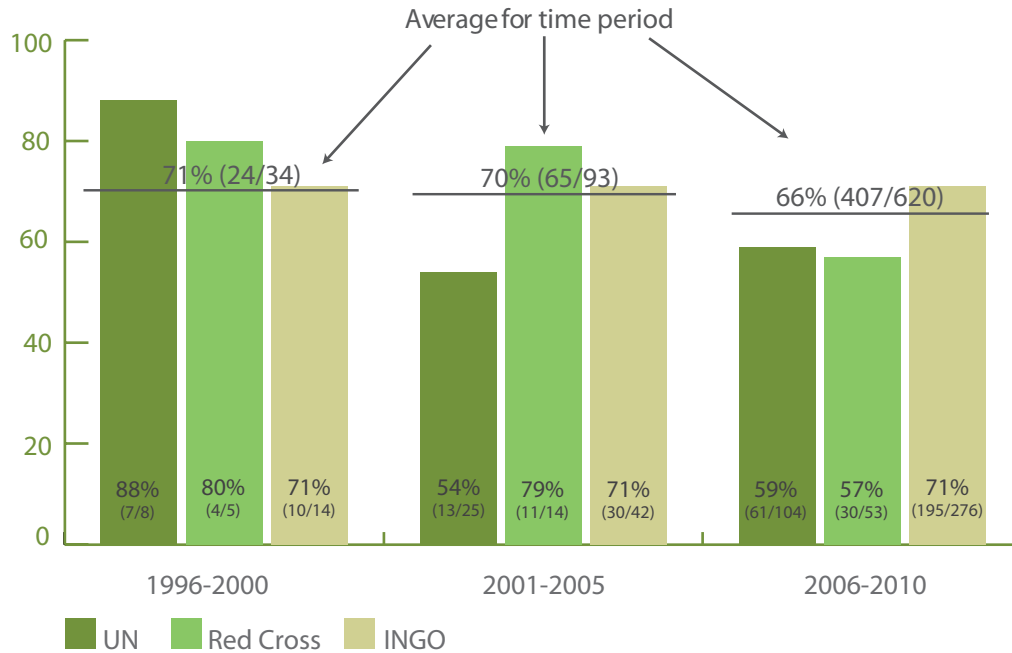
The period 1996-2000 had to be excluded from the analysis as the sample size was too small (N Killed=13 and N Kidnapped = 22) in particular as the proportion of unreported sex was high with 46% (6/13 and 10/22)

▪ **A decrease in the proportion of severe events affecting UN and Red Cross agencies in rural areas**

The available data suggest that by 2010 a smaller share of security events in rural areas affected the UN and the Red Cross. In contrast, INGOs remained highly exposed. The reduction occurred earlier for the UN than for the Red Cross and at a time when the proportion of total events affecting the UN still increased slightly (see figure 4).

Figure 4 **Security events in rural areas**

Proportion of severe events in rural areas by provider category, 1996-2010, compared to the average of all severe events in rural areas for each period



▪ **A decrease in the proportion of severe events affecting the UN on the road**

The data suggest that UN agencies have consistently experienced a lower exposure to incidents on the road than the Red Cross and INGOs. Road events affecting the Red Cross rose just above the average during the last period (see figure 5).

Figure 5 **Security events on the road**

Proportion of security events on the road by provider category, 2001-2010, compared to the average of all severe events on the road

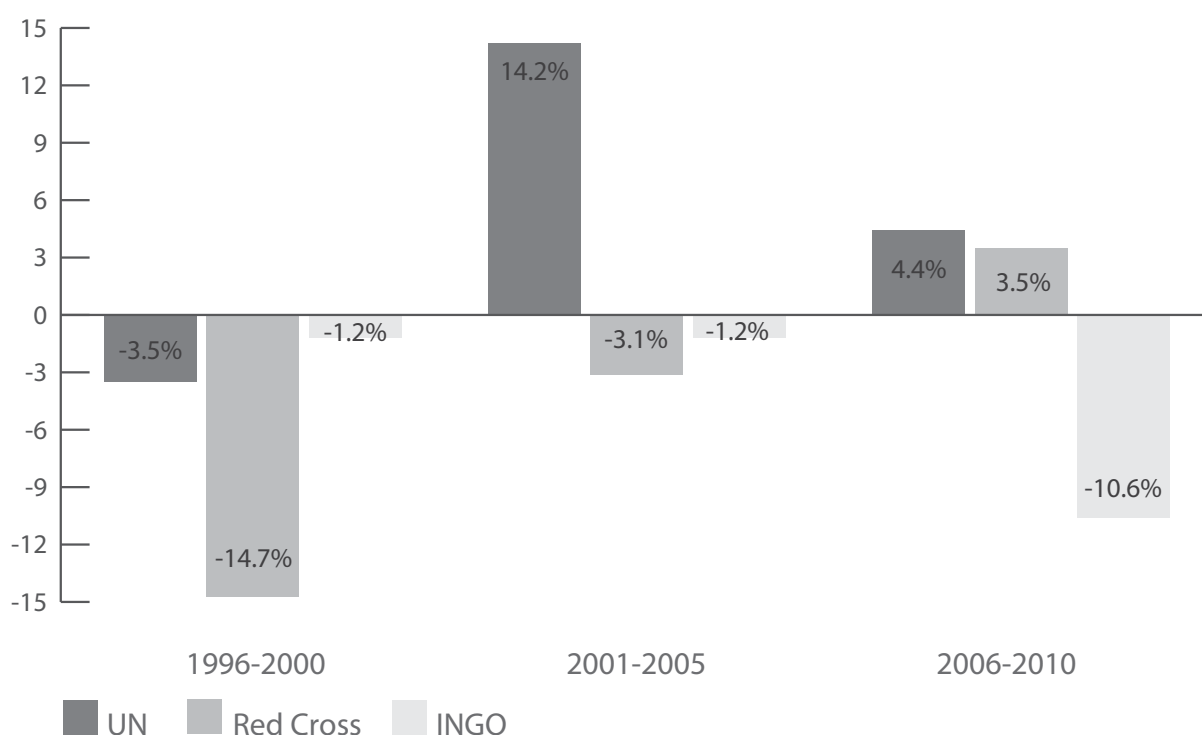


■ **An increasing proportion of security incidents affecting the UN and Red Cross occur in urban areas and during active fighting**

Among urban events the SiND data show that an increasing proportion of the severe events affect UN agencies and Red Cross organisations. UN agencies in particular have experienced higher numbers of urban security events than other humanitarian aid providers. The proportion of events affecting the Red Cross increased after 2006, while the proportion of INGO events remains below what we would expect (see figure 6). These findings are based on an analysis comparing the actual proportion of events in urban areas for the UN, Red Cross and INGOs to the expected proportion for each type of agency, based on how many events we have for each provider category within our sample.

Figure 6 Urban security events

Proportion of security events in urban areas by provider category, 1996-2010, expressed in terms of the difference between the expected to actual proportion of urban events, by provider category



1996-2000:

UN: -3.5 = 20.0% (1/5) - 23.5% (8/34)
 Red Cross: -14.7 = 0.0% (0/5) - 14.7% (5/34)
 INGO: -1.2 = 40.0% (2/5) - 41.2% (14/34)

2001-2005:

UN: 14.2 = 40.0% (10/25) - 25.8% (24/93)
 Red Cross: -3.1 = 12.0% (3/25) - 15.1% (14/93)
 INGO: -1.2 = 44.0% (11/25) - 44.5% (276/620)

2006-2010:

UN: 4.4 = 21.1% (37/175) - 16.8% (104/620)
 Red Cross: 3.5 = 12.0% (21/175) - 8.5% (53/620)
 INGO: -10.6 = 33.7% (59/175) - 44.5% (276/620)

Applying the same analytical method, it appears that severe events during periods of active fighting between two or more conflict parties disproportionately affect the UN and Red Cross (see figure 7). This tendency was particularly marked between 2001-2005 but has reduced slightly since then. As discussed above, the staff members affected by active fighting are almost exclusively national staff across all humanitarian providers.

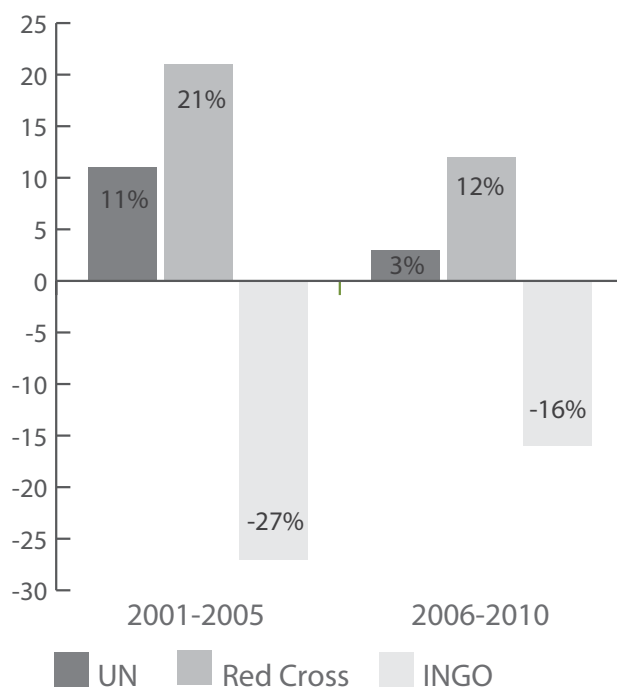
Figure 7

Security events during active fighting

Proportion of security events during active fighting by provider category, 2001-2010, expressed in terms of the difference between the expected to actual proportion of events during active fighting, by provider category

2001-2005: UN: 11=36.4% (4/11)-25.8% (24/93)
Red Cross: 21=36.4% (4/11)-15.1%(14/93)
INGOs:-27=18.2% (2/11)- 45.2% (42/93)
2006-2010: UN: 3=20.0% (16/80)- 16.8%(104/620)
Red Cross: 12=20.0% (16/80)-8.5% (53/620)
INGO: -16=28.8%(23/80)-44.5%(276/620)

11.9 and 12 percent of all recorded severe events occurred during periods of active fighting both for the period 2001-2005 and 2006-2010. If all events would be equally distributed between providers we would expect all providers to record about 12 percent of severe events during periods of active fighting.



Interpreting the Findings

■ Questioning 'risk transfer'

In humanitarian circles, the notion of 'risk transfer' has been used to describe shifting physical security risk between international agencies and from international actors to national actors. It usually describes the increasing exposure of national staff and NGOs to insecurity, the withdrawal of international staff and more risk avoidant agencies from insecure zones, and the implementation of more fortified security measures for some agencies. The SiND data on the increasing victimisation of national staff members and the rising share of INGO security incidents, particularly in insecure rural areas, appears to support this depiction of the changing burden of exposure to insecurity. However, it is questionable whether this reflects a conscious decision to transfer risk from one category to another. Rather, this pattern more likely reflects an increasing reluctance to place international staff (who may be more exposed than local staff) in danger, as well as considerations regarding the cost and effectiveness of national staff who receive lower salaries and are assumed to have greater local acceptance. Moreover, agency security management strategies and perpetrator intention are also likely to help explain differences in exposure to security incidents.

■ **The effects of security and programme management approaches on exposure to insecurity**

An organisation's approach to security management affects its exposure to security incidents. 'Hard' security measures, including armed protection and armed escorts, may have reduced the vulnerability of some agencies, particularly UN agencies, and left others more exposed as 'soft targets'. For example, the higher proportion of incidents for UN agencies in urban areas could be partly the result of the centralisation of programme management and the increasing use of 'remote control', which reduces the number of staff working in rural field stations and therefore their exposure to insecurity. The reduction in the number of events occurring on the road suggests that UN staff members travel less outside key urban centres, or that when they do so they use armed escort or other modes of travel (e.g. aircraft) to reduce their exposure to insecurity. Each of these explanations reflects programmatic and security management priorities and considerations that are often related to funding and access to resources. If this is correct, then the reduction in security events in rural areas could signal that the UN has become more averse to risk or that the UN and Red Cross have reduced their exposure in insecure remote locations. The higher proportion of events affecting INGOs in rural areas suggests that INGOs may be more present, and therefore more exposed to insecurity in these contexts. The reduction in security events on the road might highlight a policy of limiting road travel and/ or the use of increased armed escorts among UN agencies, while Red Cross organisations and INGOs continue to access beneficiary populations in many places by road and without armed protection. Exposure to insecurity can work in other ways. It is possible that UN employees are more visible in urban areas than INGO employees or may be seen as more lucrative targets for criminals, given the reputation of high levels of UN remuneration as compared to INGO pay scales. This could also explain their higher share of events in urban areas. However, security considerations are not the only factors affecting presence and vulnerability. Other factors, such as general programming priorities or even donor pressure, could have influenced this trend in addition to any security concerns.

■ **The unknown effects of perpetrator intentions and capabilities**

Some trends reported above may also result from perpetrator attitudes and behaviours. For example, the decline in the proportion of international female fatalities but not among kidnapped international female employees may indicate that some perpetrators are hesitant to kill women but not to abduct them. Likewise, it could also signal a preference in targeting men. Without better data, these factors remain difficult to assess. The increase in fatalities during active fighting could also result from the use of explosives in populated areas where humanitarian providers continue to operate, even during intensified periods of violence.

■ **Security incidents affecting humanitarian agencies in broader context**

Based on this analysis we question the notion of a cascading 'risk transfer' and suggest that the **observed changes in who is affected by security events only partly reflect a 'risk transfer'**. Many factors, ranging from agency presence and security concerns to programmatic considerations, affect agencies' exposure to insecurity. Perpetrator intentions and capabilities are important in understanding rising and falling levels of security incidents but they are less tangible. Nevertheless, in our view, these shifts indicate that agencies are more willing to operate in violent contexts, and reflect a **rise in all humanitarian providers' acceptable risk threshold**. The data reported above seem to suggest that the UN and the Red Cross Movement are more willing to assume a greater presence during periods of active fighting, while INGOs assume a greater burden of exposure to generalised insecurity and in rural areas. However, levels of security incidents are also affected by changing contexts in which agencies operate, such as active fighting or weak states, both of which limit agencies' ability to effectively manage security.

This policy brief summarises findings of a more detailed report 'Operating in Insecurity'; (Report 13-1). Both the Report and this policy brief were made possible thanks to financial support from the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (FDFA).

References

Wille, Christina and Larissa Fast. 2013. 'Operating in Insecurity: Shifting patterns of violence against humanitarian aid providers and their staff (1996-2010)' Insecurity Insight Report 13-1. Vevey, Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. www.insecurityinsight.org

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Wille Christina and Larissa Fast. 2010. Security Facts for Humanitarian Agencies: How do security events affecting humanitarian agencies differ between rural and urban environments? June 2010