

Information Note

Staff Vulnerabilities



Age/previous work experience

- Younger people tend to take more risks, and especially young men
- Older, more experienced staff tend to be able to weigh the risks better, but also tend to become complacent about risk
- Nationally recruited staff – young national staff tend to be much more at risk, from attack by armed groups, or by perception of association with opposition groups, and also because of a tendency to take risks
- A more experienced person will have a better knowledge of the risks and their potential consequences, but statistics show that more significant is the amount of time the person has spent in that specific assignment

Gender

- Female staff members are more likely to be the victim of sexual assaults, but are less likely to be taken hostage than men. Women international staff are often not subject to the same cultural norms and rules as nationally recruited women staff, and therefore may benefit from a certain degree of freedom in negotiation and debate, which is not available to other staff. However it is important that behaviour and conduct does not put international female staff at risk

Nationality

- Staff coming from a country involved in a conflict may not be perceived as neutral.
- Occasionally nationality can prove to be a risk. Whilst being mindful of equal opportunities obligations, employing agencies should take care not to place their staff in situations which could prove untenable or insecure due to their nationality.

Ethnicity

- Especially for nationally recruited staff, ethnicity is a critically important factor, and the ethnic mix of staff teams should be carefully managed. Both the social bonds between people from the same area or group are significant positive and negative factors,

as are the potential differences between people from different areas or groups. Awareness training to staff may help this

Race

- There are potential problems associated with the race of staff members in being accepted by the local population – for example an African staff member in an Arab country or in the Balkans may find difficulties in being accepted

Religion

- Care should be taken in placing staff with strong religious affiliations into situations where this could prove to be a source of tension and staff should be made aware of how their behaviour could be perceived. This also applies to staff with strong political or other beliefs. The mission, vision and values of the organisation play an important part in people's perception of its neutrality, as does its choice of local partners

Status/position

- Job titles can potentially lead to misperceptions about the role and should be chosen carefully – e.g. human rights monitor, or security manager may influence other people or groups adversely. In addition, the more senior that the job title implies, the more readily accepted the person may be at potential flash-points such as road blocks

Language and communication skills

- The inability to communicate in the international language in a country is a serious risk factor, adding substantially to the risk of an incident being misinterpreted or the level of danger increased through lack of understanding. For nationally recruited staff, the more local languages that are spoken the better will be the level of understanding of interlocutors in meetings, at roadblocks etc.

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