

acos

A L L I A N C E

ANNUAL SAFETY

COORDINATION

MEETING · 2022

NEW YORK CITY 3-5 October

SUMMARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Returning to New York City this year for the ACOS Annual Safety Coordination Meeting has been energizing and stimulating. Once again, it offered a unique opportunity for news organizations, NGOs, journalists and editors to come together in person for creative and candid conversations about safety, with a focus on freelance and under-resourced journalists. Let's remember: a culture of safety does not spare anyone.

This year we broke our own records: across a three day program we gathered **122 participants** from **68 organizations** and **23 countries**. It shows the need for this kind of cross-industry conversation.

After seven years, our meeting has become a go-to safety event in our community. It's unique in many ways. It's by invitation only to ensure there is an atmosphere of trust and complicity. The program is developed in partnership with stakeholders. We don't do panels. Instead we have presentations that showcase innovative work and convene side sessions and group discussions where everyone has access to the microphone. Participants moderate, chair, present and report back. Most of all, we deliver a working meeting that produces practical recommendations that lead to concrete outcomes.

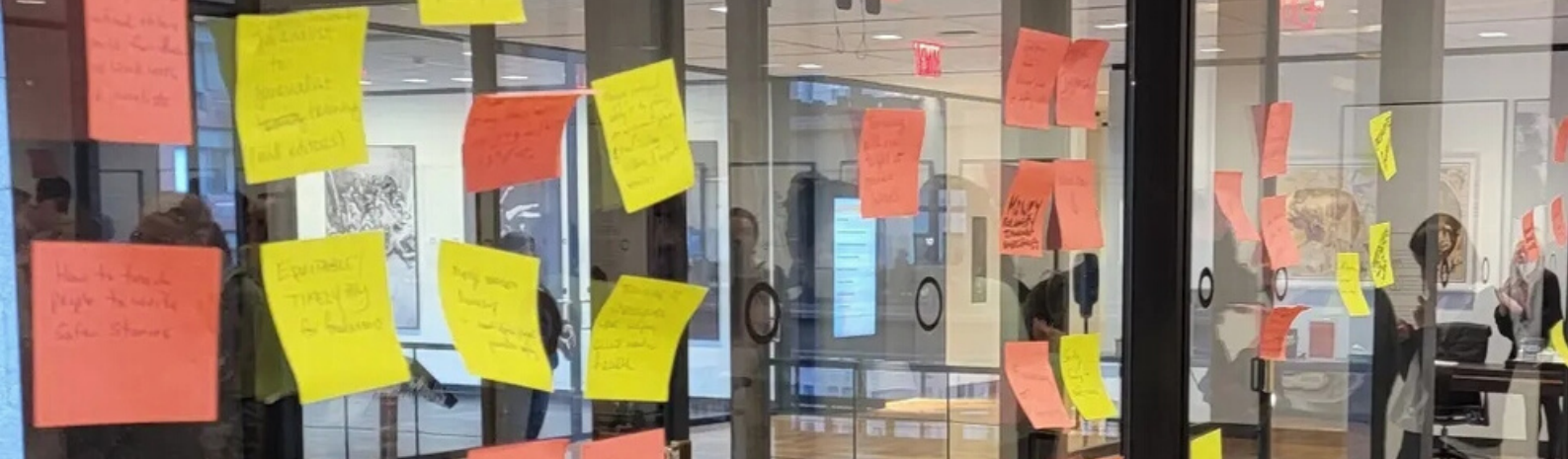
This year the program delivered sessions addressing psychological safety, online harassment, insurance, safety training strategies for investigative journalists, editors' safety awareness and training, PPE and large-scale crisis response coordination. As part of the program, we organized a series of safety workshops for a group of **30 freelancers and editors**, delivered by leading safety experts.

The success of the ACOS meeting stems from the continued generous support from the Open Society Foundations, the MacArthur Foundation and The Reva and David Logan Foundation. This year our meeting benefited from sponsorship from Google News Initiative, allowing us to contribute toward travel costs for 12 freelancers and editors to attend, while Samir Kassir Foundation and International Media Support covered travel costs for Lebanese and Afghan participants respectively. The Ford Foundation and The New York Times provided the ideal homes for us to convene. None of this would be possible without our sponsors, the Overseas Press Club Foundation.

This report consolidates key findings but it can also be used as a tool to showcase new safety innovations, and advocate for safety best practices. The ACOS meeting has a track record of serving as a catalyst for concrete and practical initiatives. We hope it does so again this year.

Elisabet Cantenys

Executive Director, ACOS Alliance



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the discussions, presentations and workshops that took place during this year's ACOS meeting. It also highlights key safety challenges, recommendations and practical next steps which we encourage our signatories, partners and the newsgathering community at large to consider and take forward.

The following big themes were highlighted as priorities:

- **Editor engagement and empowerment** is key to creating a culture of safety into newsrooms and the wider journalism community. How do we do this?
- **Psychological safety** is an integral part of proactive safety practice and training but the language traditionally used (trauma) can be limiting and off-putting to journalists and editors. How do we come up with a shared language that engages journalists and newsrooms?
- **Online harassment, threats and violence** continue to be a widespread and growing issue for journalists. Whilst progress has been made within some newsrooms to address this proactively, there is much that still needs to be done.
- **The connection between money and safety is three-fold**. Journalists need financial resources to stay safe. Newsrooms need to properly allocate financial resources to safety and NGOs need proper funding to provide meaningful safety support and education.
- **Investigative journalists urgently need safety training** that is tailored to their unique threats and needs.
- **Insurance remains a crucial safety aspect**. New policies are addressing critical gaps, some have the potential to have a deep impact in our community.
- **PPE provision remains a challenge**. A dedicated working group is needed to tackle the problems surrounding the supply and coordination of PPE to freelancers and local journalists.



TRAUMA & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY MEETING

Moderated by

Bruce Shapiro

Executive Director

Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma

The ACOS Alliance has always recognised the centrality of trauma and its effects on the freelance safety agenda. From its inception, a small working group focused on trauma was established within ACOS to prioritize these issues through dedicated time, attention and action.

Due to overwhelming interest in these topics, we expanded this year's working group to a wider range of stakeholders to advance the idea that resilience and mental health must be integrated into all parts of the journalist safety agenda.

The meeting formulated the following priorities and recommendations for ACOS and other groups to take forward. The 60 participants represented news organizations, freelancers, advocacy groups, NGOs and clinicians, so ideas were generated for each of these constituencies.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

NGOs & Advocacy Groups:

- Continue to advance the availability of appropriate psychological support for journalists around the world, including therapy.
- Expand the model for training qualified therapists outside the US with the ability to scale.
- Continue to raise awareness of the importance of psychosocial support and training available to journalists and editors.
- The term 'trauma' can be off-putting. Come up with a shared language that captures and explains the importance of psychological safety in an engaging and positive way.
- Raise awareness among funders of the importance of proactive, pre-emptive measures such as resilience training.

Journalists, NGOs, Trainers & News Organizations:

- Expand resilience training for journalists and news editors.
- Prioritize training for news managers on trauma awareness, destigmatization and the understanding of how psychological safety integrates with other aspects of safety.
- Embed psychosocial safety into safety risk assessments and training.

News Organizations:

- Identify journalist mental health as a key ingredient in better reporting and overall job performance.
- Incorporate mental health check-ins and debriefing into assignment safety protocols.
- Incorporate paid time off as part of the normal assignment process for freelancers on trauma-facing assignments.
- De-stigmatize trauma and burnout.
- Recognize the burdens and stresses on news editors and managers and provide support.

Research:

- Bring existing academic research to broader audience to improve knowledge and provide evidence-base for priorities and funding.
- More research needed on country and culture-specific contexts and how mental health systems work in different parts of the world.

PPE coordination challenges:

- Basic kit costs can add up to thousands of dollars.
- Language around PPE is often unclear and complex, making access around sourcing and procurement difficult
- Quality of PPE varies greatly.
- Sizing and fit makes buying in bulk and/or for stock difficult. Some PPE needs to be custom-fitted.
- Distribution and transportation between countries can be highly complex and risky with regulations varying from country to country.
- Many journalists don't know how to properly use and look after PPE.
- Liability concerns can deter organizations from stocking and distributing PPE.

Suggestions for practical solutions:

- Creating a centralized hub or working group that gathers essential information about PPE could serve as a practical and much-needed resource for organizations and journalists. Note there is an existing group coordinating PPE efforts in Ukraine. Any new efforts should build on existing initiatives and involve key players.
- Generate stores of relevant PPE accessible to journalists within their own countries and localities.
- Multilingual training on how to use and look after PPE.
- Dedicated funding for procurement and distribution.

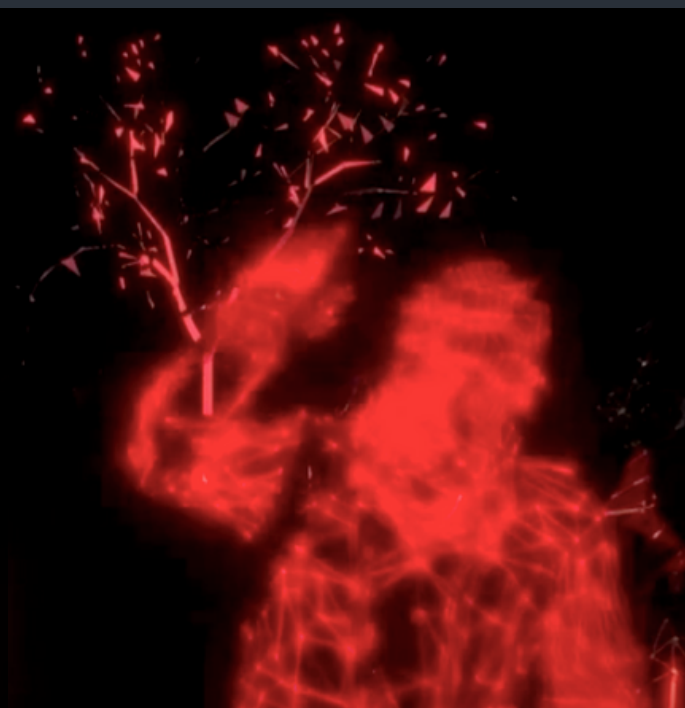
PRESENTATIONS

New safety projects & innovations

A NEW APPROACH TO SAFETY TRAINING

VICE Media x Head Set

The VICE Media safety team has partnered with Head Set VR to offer safety training that enables journalists to develop emotional resilience, tactics and strategies alongside safety and first aid skills by experiencing ‘real life’ situations in a safe and controllable environment. This has led VICE to change their approach to safety training: emotional resiliency is now the foundation around which they build their courses, with Head Set VR incorporated throughout.



WHATSAPP INITIATIVE

Committee to Protect Journalists

CPJ's new WhatsApp channel is a chatbot that automatically shares safety information. It is currently being piloted for freelance journalists going into Ukraine with a Ukrainian-language option now ready to use. The bot offers physical and digital safety resources, pre-assignment information, links to trauma support and an emergency contact. Its aim is to make it easier for journalists to find, review, and use safety information before, during, and after their reporting by providing a direct line to information using a “choose-your-own-adventure” method.

DIGITAL SECURITY LAB

RSF Germany

RSF's new Digital Security Lab analyzes digital attacks against individual journalists to try to find out how they happened. This includes checking computers, laptops and phones for spyware, such as Pegasus. The lab provides journalists with proof or indications that a device has been hacked so that they can take the appropriate action. Currently the service is only available in German and English but they do have some funding for translators.



FIXING JOURNALISM

Frontline Freelance Mexico

This project was set up to shift the imbalance between international correspondents and fixers in Mexico and to eliminate the inequality between journalists from the Global North and those in the Global South. Its aim is to professionalize the role of fixers through education, enabling them to be hired for better journalistic roles, and receive proper compensation and credits as producers or journalists. It also aims to educate international correspondents into better and more respectful working practices with fixers and local producers. This will have an impact on safety as well as working conditions.

SAFER STORYTELLING

International Research for Impact & Storytelling (IRIS)

This research project, initiated by Ford Foundation and targeted at funders, looks at the safety needs and challenges of visual storytellers who often fall through the safety cracks, eg. documentary filmmakers and artists. The report's recommendations include the funding of key safety and support organizations at all levels, security-inclusive funding that empowers storytellers to invest in their own protection, separate from production funding, and pooled access around key issues such as insurance. Financial support for collaboration and connectivity between different organizations is also recommended. IRIS is now raising awareness of the report among funders and investing in infrastructure whilst continuing to provide resources.



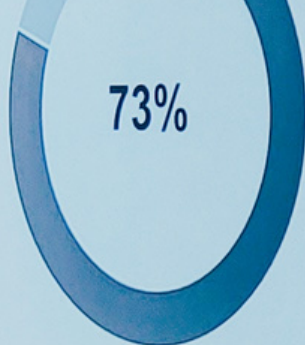
INSURANCE

ACOS Alliance, Reporters without Borders (RSF) & Organised Crime and Reporting Project (OCCRP)

ACOS' goal is to see affordable comprehensive insurance solutions available for all journalists, especially freelancers and local journalists.

We have worked with insurance brokers to bring into fruition two policies, [Insurance for Journalists](#) and [Insurance for Local Media](#) which provide basic but essential medical cover to all journalists and media workers regardless of nationality or place of residence. [Reporters without Borders](#) have this year relaunched an insurance policy for journalists traveling to conflict and high risk areas which can include equipment cover alongside medical. ACOS and RSF agree there is still a need to improve the policies that are currently available.

The [OCCRP](#) has been working on developing an insurance product for libel slander and has plans to launch this in 2023. [The Reporters Mutual](#) aims to give media and civil society organizations large and small access to affordable and comprehensive cover that will provide them and their journalists with the legal support and confidence to publish public interest stories in the face of growing legal threats. Reporters Mutual will be non-profit. It will work with the Bar Association to get a low-bono rate and guaranteed pre-vetting for stories prior to publication.



Women respondents experienced online violence in the course of their work

Attacked or abused offline in connection with online violence



38%

Received threats of violence against those close to them



30%

MOBILIZING NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TO ADDRESS ONLINE ABUSE

Moderated by
Viktorya Vilk
& Jeje Mohammed
PEN America

In a recent global study by the ICFJ and UNESCO, 73% of women-identifying journalists responded that they had been the target of online abuse with 30% saying it resulted in self-censorship and 20% saying it led to offline incidents. Most media organizations are unprepared for this.

As members of the Coalition Against Online Violence - a consortium of 60+ organizations who are working in different parts of the world to combat online abuse - PEN America and the ACOS Alliance are leading a Newsroom Working Group to help strengthen the industry's response to online violence. We have two goals: to help newsrooms understand their duty of care and responsibilities to journalists who face online abuse, and to develop a set of industry standards that will help newsrooms and news managers implement best practices.

This year's ACOS meeting offered the opportunity to gather valuable input for this initiative to move forward.



20%

Attacked or abused
offline in connection with
online violence



38%

Made themselves less
visible

Key challenges:

- Few newsrooms take a preemptive approach to online abuse and lack a formal duty of care when incidents occur
- Most of the support that journalists currently receive is from peers on an adhoc basis.
- Support offered is rarely holistic - news organizations often designate just one person as the go-to for guidance and support around online abuse, which is a significant burden to place on one individual and also impractical because effective response often requires a range of skill sets.
- Many organizations have detailed social media policies for journalists, but do not acknowledge online abuse or outline their responsibilities to journalists facing online abuse.
- Newsrooms and editors are already dealing with multiple challenges and heavy workloads and online abuse is a difficult, widespread and growing problem - effective protocols need to address this.

Key recommendations for news organizations:

- Acknowledge and clearly communicate that online abuse is a critical safety issue - journalists need to feel safe to report violence and come forward with concerns
- Develop a proactive approach with protocols aimed at preparing for online abuse before it happens
- Streamline reporting and support systems so journalists know what to do and who to reach out to when they are facing abuse or threats
- Create a task force of individuals with a range of skillsets to navigate and respond to online abuse effectively.

BREAK OUT SESSIONS

Working groups addressed the following topics:

ONLINE SAFETY TRAINING FOR EDITORS

Moderated by

WAN-IFRA & ACOS Alliance

It's essential to include editors in good safety practice. ACOS and WAN-IFRA presented their new online safety training pilot project for editors to seek input on what would make it most useful and relevant to busy editors and newsrooms. Discussions considered the challenges and opportunities provided by online courses and areas such as content, format, incentives and organizational buy-in. Managing trauma and mental health, editors' responsibilities for staff and freelancers, and digital safety were suggested as the top three priority subject areas. Limited running times were also recommended to make the course manageable and appealing for time-strapped editors.

What do you think is more appealing to editors?



SAFETY & THE CLASSROOM: PREPARING FUTURE JOURNALISTS

Moderated by

James W Foley Legacy Foundation

This group discussed strategies for incorporating safety into the undergraduate and graduate journalism curriculum, so that it becomes embedded into everyday working practices. Should safety have a separate course? What's the minimum that should be taught? How does the language used affect how students view safety as a relevant and valuable subject? And what recommendations should be offered to those teaching and training future journalists? Convening a larger and more diverse pull of professors and students who are using current safety curriculums was suggested as a useful next step to gather their views and answer these questions.

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST SAFETY TRAINING STRATEGIES

Moderated by

**Centre for Investigative Journalists
& Global Investigative Journalists Network**

What are the safety training needs of investigative and watchdog journalists and how do they differ from those covered in standard HEFAT? Investigative journalists face disproportionate threats in key areas – as individual targets of concerted attack, legal persecution, data theft, surveillance and smear campaigns.

Collaborative models and investigations into attacks have provided some safety protection, as have some new open source tools, but much more training and support is still needed for the IJ community. This requires commitment and buy-in from journalists, editors and newsrooms. Which organizations are best placed to take this forward?



SAFETY WORKSHOPS

This year's meeting included a morning of workshops for 30 freelance journalists and editors which covered the following aspects of safety:

- **Protection mechanisms for hacking, doxxing and online abuse.**
- **Creating a robust risk assessment for freelancers.**
- **Creating robust safety protocols for editors.**
- **Safety for civil disobedience using VR technology.**
- **Psychological safety and resilience.**

Participants were also offered access to one-to-one personalized advice on a specific safety issue of their choice.

Sponsorship from Google News Initiative and support from the Samir Kassir Foundation enabled us to bring freelancers and editors from China, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Ukraine, UK and Mexico to attend these workshops and the wider meeting.

The ACOS Alliance organized these workshops with the following leading safety experts who provided their time pro bono:

Sharbil Nammour, Global Head of Security & Ramy Ghaly, Production Security Manager, VICE Media; Kate Parkinson, Co-founder, Head Set; Maria Salazar-Ferro, Director of Newsroom Safety & Resilience, The New York Times; Nathan Puffer, Senior Vice President, Risk & Resilience, Dow Jones; Yemile Bucay, Head of Journalist Safety & Privacy, BuzzFeed; Bruce Shapiro, Executive Director, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma; Viktorya Vilks, Program Director, Digital Safety & Free Expression & Jeje Mohammed, Program Manager, Digital Safety and Free Expression, PEN America; Maria Ordzhonikidze, Executive Director, Justice for Journalists.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT SAFETY CRISIS



INTRODUCTION

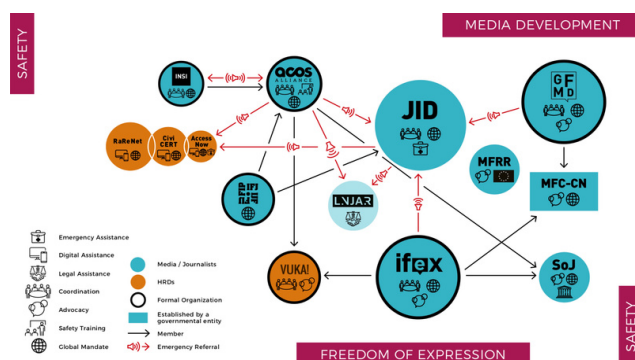
Afghanistan and Ukraine have highlighted the need for our community to be better prepared when it comes to large scale safety crises. Both have required a range of complex emergency responses - from evacuation, asylum and legal support to cross-border PPE transportation and rapid safety training - which have tested the coordination efforts of the organizations involved.

With coordination and collaboration a key pillar of ACOS' work, we used the opportunity of this year's Annual Safety Coordination Meeting to offer a safe space for a candid conversation around this issue. Our objectives were to share knowledge, build consensus around recommendations, and suggest next steps for leading partners to take forward.

The meeting was attended by 50 individuals from 30 organizations. It included brief presentations from the Journalists In Distress network (JiD), International Media Support (IMS), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Associated Press (AP) and Agence France Presse (AFP), followed by a series of working group discussions. The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) presented their recent report, [Coordinating Media Assistance and Journalism Support Efforts](#). The results of a mapping exercise commissioned by the ACOS Alliance and GFMD, and conducted by Courtney Radsch, provided an overview of the networks and coalitions currently providing various levels of coordination in our community.

This report offers consolidated notes from the meeting and it's organized into two sections: recommendations for our community to take on board, and suggested next steps: concrete practical tasks and activities to be taken forward by key stakeholders.

While some organizations and groups have already expressed interest in leading or working on some of these activities, we hope that by sharing this report more stakeholders will engage.



Graphic shows the networks and coalitions currently providing various levels of coordination. From mapping commissioned by ACOS & GFMD & carried out by Courtney Radsch.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conduct shared needs assessments + agree on priorities

In a large-scale crisis it's impossible to help everyone or attend to all needs so organizations need to be realistic and manage expectations. Conducting shared needs assessments, and collectively defining and agreeing clear priorities can help channel the resources available and make the support more effective.

Define working groups based on priorities and distribute tasks and responsibilities across organizations and individuals

These working groups can be thematic (e.g. visas, shelters, PPE). Identify and agree which organizations and individuals have the capacity and interest to join a thematic working group and/or undertake specific tasks and responsibilities. Small groups are proven to be more effective, while distributing tasks makes us more efficient.

Create communication plans

Streamline communications by establishing clear and secure paths for information to be shared and channeled. Keep it simple. Using a central point of contact can help avoid an overload of information exchange. Be aware: local partners are often overwhelmed by uncoordinated communications from international groups, which results in poor performance and increased risks.

Create joint mappings

Knowing who is who, who is doing what and what's in place is crucial. Joint efforts and shared mappings have a better chance of providing a more comprehensive and accurate picture. Mappings should help identify key people and include contacts. New mappings should build on existing research and knowledge, and include a diversity of stakeholders at local, regional and international level (from NGOs to news organizations, humanitarian groups and agencies, funders, etc.). Be generous with the information you have.

Keep records

Have a simple and accessible mechanism to keep collective records of the information and knowledge gained. This should include funding (e.g. recording donor pledges and what is being done by donors has proven to be useful).

(cont./over)

Listen to local organizations

International efforts need stronger representation from local organizations, and find ways to support and empower these. International stakeholders need to respect local partner's capacities, needs, experience and process to facilitate transfer of knowledge.

Crises cannot be met with cookie cutter approaches

Coordinated responses need to be adapted to the particularities of a crisis.

Funding modalities

Funding should provide enough flexibility to respond to an evolving crisis adequately and meet long-term needs. Collaboration is costly and it should be properly funded.

Organizations responding to crises need to have a clear understanding of remits

There is a misunderstanding of what groups working on media development and emergencies do or are able to do. This hinders our ability to coordinate once a crisis hits. We need to learn about each other's work and, in a crisis, come together sooner.

Consider the duty of care and long term plans for individuals

We need to address the gaps in our strategies and planning for long term sustainability, for those fleeing and remaining. Could this happen alongside questions about media development and long term planning for the country's media landscape? We could establish two parallel tracks working collaboratively, one dealing with emergency response and one focusing on the long term.

Rebuilding the media is a multi stage and long process.

Crises aren't just bad for individuals but for whole communities. The focus of the media is usually survival, which makes it more important for media development groups to focus on long term planning when those on the ground cannot. There's a need to support not only individuals but the broader ecosystem as a whole.

Advocacy groups need to come together

To coordinate and support emergency assistance work (e.g. relocation, visas, etc.)

Invest in individual institutional preparedness for future crises, e.g. SOPs.



SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

The following concrete action points were agreed by participants as practical activities to take forward by key stakeholders. We invite organizations to identify which of these they would like to work on and propose a timeline for completing them:

Research systems that can be replicated or adapted to any major crisis.

For example, take the humanitarian model - usually one umbrella organization with other agencies underneath and coordination clusters for visas, extraction, health, etc. What can we learn from existing effective systems? Systems should be able to expand/flex/shift.

Create guidelines defining what a crisis situation is.

There are grey areas and we might have some blind spots. Learn from concrete examples of missed crisis situations.

Research and set up early warning mechanisms.

How can we read the red flags and prepare for the worst case scenario? What already exists for this? What do we need to have in place? Do not overlook ongoing crises.

Develop a shared workflow or protocol for emergencies.

Define a chain of actions and tasks to implement in the context of a large-scale crisis that includes key organizations and groups and is based on a collaborative approach.

Advocate donors

To fund collaboration, provide flexible funding and support long term efforts.

(cont./over)

Working Groups

Develop ongoing thematic working groups outside of a crisis. The following two groups were suggested:

- Personal Protection Equipment (PPE): focused on compiling practical information and knowledge (e.g. suppliers, distribution, regulations). Define scope of the group and key stakeholders. Not attached to a particular crisis or conflict.
- Advocacy: focused on enhancing advocacy collaboration, linking with emergency response groups and organizations. Define scope of the group and key stakeholders.

Communications

- Improve communication between coalitions and networks. Build on existing groups and invest in the ability to better communicate with each other. Could our community develop a simple mechanism for this?
- Strengthen coordination between media and NGOs. Find the best channels of communication. Prepare bridges between newsrooms (global and local correspondents) with NGOs secretariats/networks and grassroots organizations. Facilitate debriefing.