

Risk Assessment in Human Rights Defense Methodological Guide from the Psychosocial Approach





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(Aluna Psychosocial Accompaniment)

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The development of this publication was based on *Cuaderno para facilitar Valoración de Riesgo Guía Metodológica* [Workbook for Facilitating Risk Assessment. Methodological Guide] created by Lorena Peralta (2016) and with contributions from Sandra Hertkorn (2017) as well as a variety of publications that we have developed at Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial, A.C., including *Keys toward Psychosocial Accompaniment* (2016), *Modelo de acompañamiento psicosocial Aluna* [Aluna Psychosocial Accompaniment Model] (2017); *As Women HDRs, how do we face fear in the current context?* (2018), in collaboration with JASS; *"If not us as women, who? If not now, when?"* (2019); and *El enfoque psicosocial: Un aporte* [The Psychosocial Approach: A Contribution].



We thank all the people and organizations that have allowed us to accompany them from the psychosocial approach, and we dedicate this material to them.

By retrieving some of these experiences, we have enriched the methodology that we are now sharing with other political subjects, thus contributing to their ability to better face risks in a context of sociopolitical violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Discussing security within the framework of human rights defense in Mexico has become a priority as it is among the most important challenges due to the complexity of the contexts in which defenders carry out their work and the numerous risks they face within the structure of **sociopolitical violence** that is sustained by the neoliberal and patriarchal system. This is why the different organizations that work on the issue have used their experiences to develop methodologies which make it possible to analyze the contexts, risks, and situations that people and groups are exposed to when contributing to social transformation through their work.

There are many tools that also respond to different ways of seeing, thinking, and acting when it comes to security issues. This guide's content is based on international methodologies from organizations such as Protection International and Front Line Defenders as well as organizations in Mexico such as Acción Urgente para Defensores and Comité Cerezo México, among others. Accordingly, we have incorporated some of these tools, complementing them with the accompaniment model proposed by Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial, A.C. (hereinafter, Aluna)¹ and adapting them to the specificities of the contexts and the political subjects whom we accompany.

Through the tools we share here, we aim to support groups, organizations, communities, and individuals who—amid diverse economic, political, and cultural disputes—are at risk for having sought out alternatives to liberation through their social struggles in the face of the oppression strategies imposed by power dynamics that attack people's dignity. At Aluna, we call these people and groups **political subjects**, provided they are actors who, from a critical viewpoint of the context and the power relations, aim to transform society and demand compliance with human rights. This definition encompasses a wide range of actors (victims, defenders, journalists, social

1 Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial, A.C. (Aluna Psychosocial Accompaniment) is an organization that was founded in 2013 in response to a concern about the effects of political and economic violence in Mexico. It aims to carry out its work in the fields of mental health and human rights from a psychosocial perspective, offering tools to organizations and communities that have been victims of human rights violations so they might face the effects of this violence and secure the conditions that allow them to do their work.

Aluna's name is part of the creation myth of the Kogui people of Colombia; the logo design was inspired by a mola, a type of hand-made decorative textile from the Kuna culture, whose people live in a territory shared by Panama and Colombia.

movements, and others). For us, the reflection-action surrounding security happens because political subjects claim ownership of their own notions of security and related practices and construct them autonomously, based on the particular needs of their work and the **harm** that sociopolitical violence causes.

From the **psychosocial approach**, we understand that the risks associated with sociopolitical violence cause multiple impacts within different settings, levels, and dimensions of political subjects' lives, which also create ways of coping that allow them to carry on with their work. One of these coping mechanisms is to address the issue of security.

With this in mind, this guide aims to present some of the keys to performing a risk assessment from the psychosocial approach in which positions, knowledge, and systematized experiences are collectively constructed, making it possible to focus on the details that should not be overlooked in order to interpret risk as one of the elements when developing a security strategy and consider protection plans and protocols as only part of this work's results. From this perspective, the interrelation between security and protecting life are of particular interest along with the structure and strategic planning of organizations, hence the importance of making security strategic and comprehensive and how this turns into specific actions and mechanisms in organizations' daily tasks.

Accordingly, the guide includes a workshop made up of different exercises that can be done together or separately to perform a risk assessment from the psychosocial approach. We will begin by explaining some of the basic concepts for comprehending the approach and the way we understand risk and security from this perspective. Then, we present our theoretical-methodological points of reference, and, finally, the workshop's methodological proposal.

SECURITY FROM THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH



The **psychosocial approach** is a perspective that was first developed in Latin America in the 1980s, arising from the structure of resistance to models of domination in the Global South. It is a perspective that has allowed for constructing a series of theoretical-political categories through praxis along with methodological tools that facilitate analysis of the social structures that are sustained in the neoliberal and patriarchal system within which sociopolitical violence is reproduced. At Aluna, when we speak of the psychosocial approach, we refer to the viewpoint from which we do accompaniment work; it is recognizing the angle of our thinking, the lens that allows us to see the reality of different types of violence, the impacts and coping processes of the affected individuals and groups. The approach is to state the place where we have situated ourselves in order to act.²

We understand **sociopolitical violence** to be the strategy—be it subtle or open—used by the State with the aim of controlling the population in order to impose political, economic, or ideological interests. This violence is exercised by state agents through action, omission, or complicity with non-state actors who serve groups of power on a structural and economic level, such as private companies and organized crime.

It is worth stressing that this conception of sociopolitical violence corresponds to Mexico's contemporary political context. The characterization of control mechanisms, the strategies, and the actors who intervene in each context make the expression of sociopolitical violence complex and give the concept meaning. For example, the dictatorial regimes of the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone (Argentina and Chile) were characterized as being monolithic States, in which the State secured absolute control over the population and territory through the army and in which repressing the majority of the population was a strategy on a national level. Today in Mexico, we are facing a different situation. While repression committed by military and police authorities does continue, not all acts of violence toward the population are created by the State; organized crime and corporate activity play a fundamental role and cause

2 Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial A.C. (2019) "El enfoque psicosocial: Un aporte para el trabajo de acompañamiento en contextos de violencia" [The Psychosocial Approach: A contribution to accompaniment work in contexts of violence]. Unpublished.

regional and local violence in a particular way.³ Yet, regardless of which actors are exercising this violence, the State is the actor that is responsible for putting an end to its maintenance and reproduction. Sociopolitical violence is characterized by its intensity and destructive power that overtake subjects to the point of damaging the physical and psychological mechanisms that usually offer them resistance and protection.

It is important to be able to identify how sociopolitical violence is expressed in a certain context and also continue to reflect by rethinking it in light of new challenges that emerge from a neoliberal economic system on a global scale, which includes the imposition of mega projects, the extraction of natural resources, and the impacts of climate change, among others.

At Aluna, we recognize that it is fundamental to decipher what underlies pain and harm in situations of political violence, as we believe that, when political subjects understand psychosocial impacts, it becomes possible for them to face them and strengthen their autonomy in accordance with their individual and collective conditions and capacities. Therefore, we think it is important to contribute to incorporating what has been destructured, thus recreating visions in order to form alternatives when facing situations of oppression and resignify the painful experience in order to resist in a dignified way and continue building paths of hope amid the pain and powerlessness.

Based on the above, we have developed a **Psychosocial Accompaniment Model** that is grounded on a theoretical, conceptual framework and retrieves our experience as accompanists,⁴ which we have revisited in order to create this guide. In this model, we understand the psychosocial approach to be a way of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the **psychosocial impacts** that are expressed on an individual, collective, and social level, and we identify four fields of the effects on political subjects: psycho-emotional, internal dynamics of the organization, the political project, and security.

This is how we aim to strengthen political subjects by using tools and strategies in these interrelated fields. While, at times, working within one of the fields is prioritized in accordance with the specific needs of those with whom accompanists work, in reality, they are all equally relevant.

³ Idem.

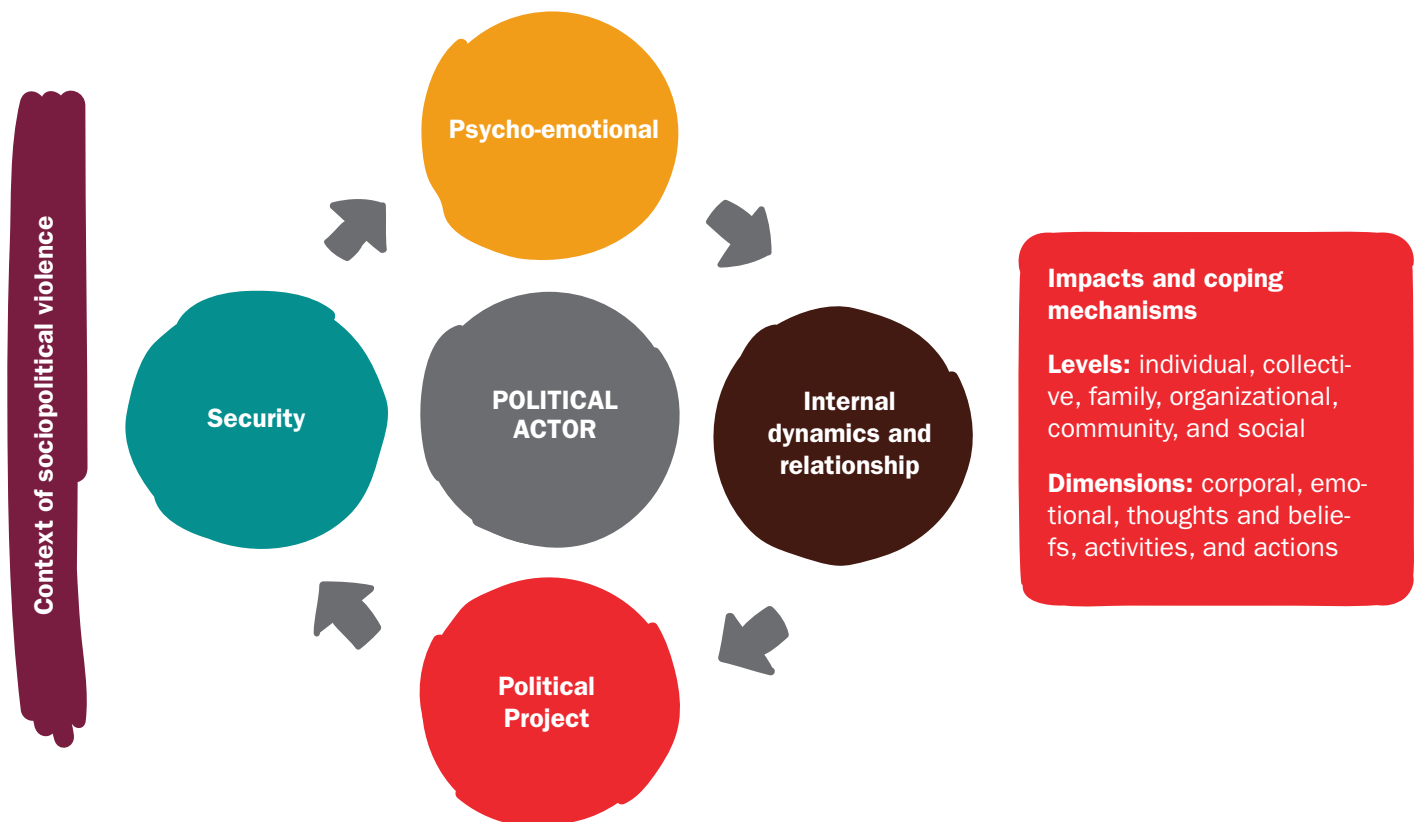
⁴ At Aluna, we use the term “accompanists” to refer to those who carry out psychosocial accompaniment work.

Psycho-emotional: In the broadest sense, this refers to the emotions, feelings, and effects on the corporal and spiritual dimension that are experienced in the process of coping with a border-line situation.

Internal Dynamics and Relationships: Everything regarding the relationships and structures of groups (roles, communication, activities, structure, functioning, etc.).

Political Project: This deals with ethical-political conceptions and orientations that guide the actions of an organization or individuals within a collective.

Security: The set of measures, practices, and reflections related to prevention and protection that defenders develop on individual and collective levels based on their exposure to different degrees of risk.



For the purposes of this material, we will center on security while considering how it is related to the other fields of psychosocial work, as this will allow us to approach it in a comprehensive fashion, recognizing its scope and limits as well as identifying difficulties or situations that are not necessarily only related to this field, thus opening an area for collective strengthening strategies that can be taken into account in the medium and long term.

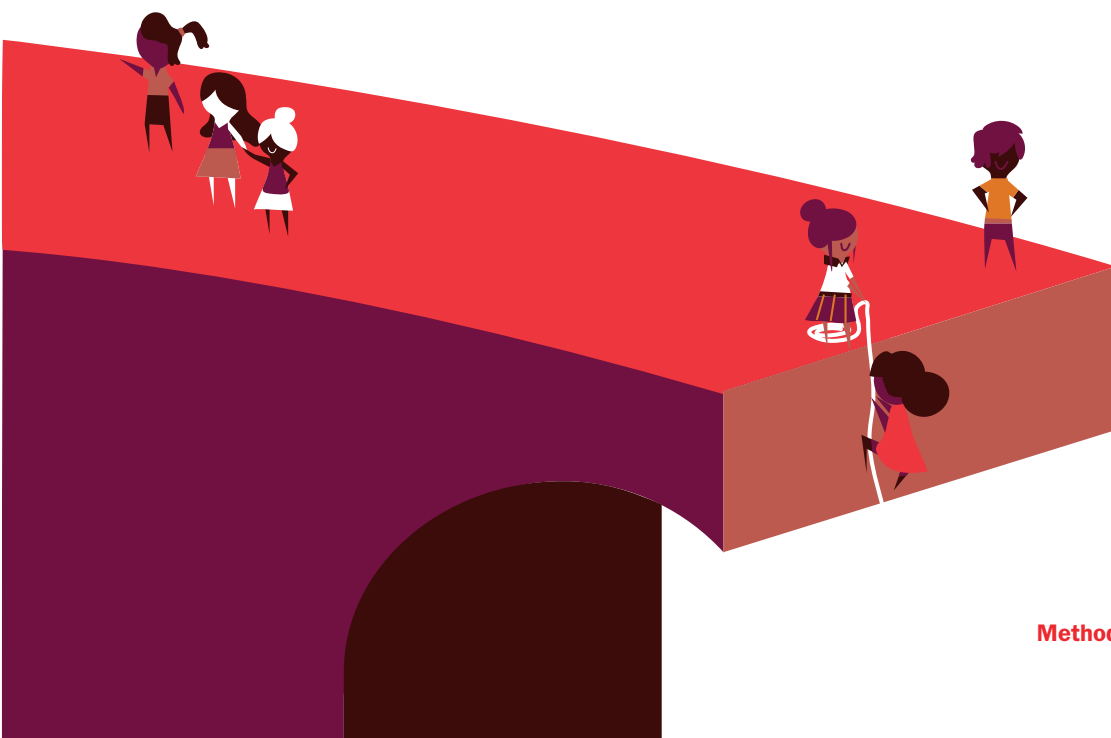
As part of how we address security, we understand risk to be the possibility that a negative physical, emotional, or psychological effect will be produced that, in some cases, can put one's life at risk. These effects can be on individuals, the collective, or the organization, and we know they are among the conditions that defenders experience because of the work they do in contexts of sociopolitical violence where they face different actors who exercise power to defend their interests. In the case of women defenders, the risk is also made more complex through the implementation of specific types of violence that are sustained within the patriarchal system. The individual and collective process for facing risks first entails recognizing that they exist, which is not always easy, whether because the conditions for addressing them do not exist, because of the fear produced by this vulnerability, or because there is a wish to prioritize caring for other people. In accompaniment work, we have observed that these risks bring about different psychosocial impacts in each field. Some examples are presented below:

Psycho-Emotional: Some of the impacts created by the risk are expressed in emotions such as powerlessness, which comes from the sensation of not being able to respond to what is happening, fear because physical and emotional integrity are at stake, and guilt from placing the responsibility for the risk we are experiencing on ourselves or on someone else from the organization. Because it is hard to share these emotions, occasionally a lack of dialogue about them prevents this experience from being collectivized, contributing to a private experience of this field's impacts, which produces a sensation of loneliness and isolation in addition to blocking it from becoming part of the analysis that is necessary for creating a comprehensive security and protection strategy.

Internal Dynamics: On occasion, constant exposure to risk affects the internal structure of the collective to the extent that its members become aware of the vulnerability and the possibility of the harm they are exposed to through their work. This constant exposure can disrupt bonds, communication, and the configuration of teams, causing tension and conflicts as a result of the distrust surrounding the situation of risk and the different ways of experiencing it, expressing it, interpreting it, and facing it on individual and collective levels. Moreover, the lack of risk analysis, collective strategies, clear roles, and activities for facing them hampers the possibility of preventing them and reacting to them in a coordinated manner.

Political Project: The constant risks—which contexts of sociopolitical violence increase and make more complex—can modify collectives' activities and rhythms, leading them to question or even alter the vision of their main objective, as facing these situations sometimes entails postponing actions or not doing them any longer or compels the organization to act differently.

Security: All collectives have a way of viewing security and assuming it, although they do not necessarily have tangible strategies. Yet, facing a situation of risk makes them question how they react. The lack of a comprehensive security and protection strategy keeps them from addressing the risk from a preventative stance. Furthermore, when security measures and agreements are not constantly updated, they lose relevance, meaning, and applicability in the organization's daily work, increasing its exposure to risks.



METHODOLOGICAL BASIS

To share the tools from this methodological guide, we think it is important to mention that the psychosocial accompaniment model proposed by Aluna is primarily based on three theoretical-methodological references that have resulted from Latin American Critical Thinking; all three share the objective of emancipating oppressed peoples. They are Liberation Social Psychology, Popular Education, and Participatory Research Action. Additionally, we are in the process of incorporating the Feminist Perspective into our model, as while it was not explicitly studied from the beginning, we deem it relevant.



- **Liberation Social Psychology** is a school of thought that emerged in the 1980s in Latin America at a particular historic moment that was characterized by experiences of structural violence. In the 1970s, social psychology was going through a theoretical crisis, as the clinical perspective did not suffice for understanding the causes of negative effects and tended to individualize subjects. This is how Ignacio Martín Baró, the leading contributor to this school of thought, incorporated the strengths of psychology and sociology to develop tools for research and action with oppressed groups.
- **Participatory Action-Research (PAR)**, created by Fals Borda as an alternative within social sciences, emphasizes collective research principles and experimentation based on evidence and social history in which the groups that are to be researched are no longer the “object” of study, but rather they become the protagonist “subject” of the research, thus having an active, collaborative, and reflective role.
- **Popular Education** is a branch of pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire, who demonstrated the need to develop education and training processes that do not answer to the capitalist schemes that reproduce their values and principles in formal education. This school of thought is based on the need for people to be educated according to collective principles and for them to develop their potentials while also gaining the capacity to question and transform their reality.
- The **Feminist Perspective** lets us provide an account of sociopolitical violence in relation to the symbolic order of gender, which is part of the structure of the different types of violence and oppression that heighten the impacts on political subjects. One of the categories we employ is that of **intersectionality**, which comes from the black

feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s, which set forth a theoretical-methodological perspective that speaks of the way different forms of oppression (resulting not only from the condition of gender but also from race, social class, ethnicity, and age, among others) converge into a particular situation. Furthermore, we believe community feminism may be one of the concepts that best captures the voice of women from Latin America and the reflections of their forerunners.

This methodology considers some aspects that are indispensable in the accompaniment model for facilitating these techniques and activities:

- Have knowledge of the people with whom one is working and of their present context.
- Be familiar with their previous experience regarding the issues to be worked on.
- Have clear work objectives based on the dialogue with those who are involved and gear the methodology in this direction.
- Consider how the fields of psychosocial work are related (as explained below).
- Have extensive knowledge of the techniques and activities that are within reach.

At Aluna, we believe it is necessary for the selected activities and techniques to have certain characteristics:

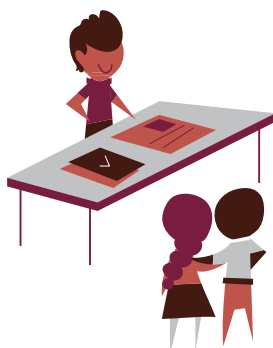
1. Base them on the experience, life lessons, and knowledge of the people themselves. Legitimize their vision of reality, of what has happened, of their feelings, beliefs, etc. Build trust so people can express themselves and share.
2. Carry out a critical analysis of their life lessons and experiences. This allows for rationalizing certain emotions, separating elements of the reality or bringing together the ones that appear dissociated, going into further depth on previously explored aspects, viewing situations from a distance and from different perspectives, drawing conclusions about things that did not have any order or did not make sense before the analysis, and identifying behavioral patterns.
3. Link or complement. By this, we mean that the information, knowledge, and experiences formed in the workshops should be linked to other experiences that the accompanied people have had, making

it possible to create a daily practice of continuously mirroring ourselves in the dialogue we are facilitating and in what takes place in the group as a result of this facilitation process.

4. In the face of the situation, transform the perspective and the role; that is, change the way they see themselves, their experiences, and the negative effects they have suffered and, consequently, the identification of roles, needs, and objectives considering the situations they are facing.
5. Define courses of action. These should allow for strategies to be developed collectively, both for long-term situations and for unanticipated events that happen in the short-term.
6. Think strategically. In addition to being essential for conducting the workshop or exercises, the methodology we employ should aim to contribute to the development of this capacity.
7. Return to the reality or practice with new elements. That is, we want the content that is addressed during the workshop or exercises to have an impact on participants' daily work.

We recognize that there are a variety of ways to approach security and risk assessment; accordingly, the exercises and tools that we share here are optional and can be adapted to the needs and experiences of the different individuals, organizations, and collectives. It is important to select the exercises properly and also to be flexible and creative in making corrections along the way and experimenting with new alternatives.

Accordingly, this guide includes concepts, exercises, and prompting questions that, structured as a workshop, invite groups to reflect about risk within the framework of security and protection, keeping their individual and collective experiences from their most present everyday contexts as a focal point. This material was designed to offer **the possibility of holding a two-day workshop or the option of doing each exercise separately according to the needs of each individual or of the collective; in some cases, there are optional activities for addressing the same issue.** Likewise, it is conceived for organizations, collectives, and communities to analyze their contexts and develop their risk assessment to then strengthen their security strategies, and, as the case may be, they can replicate it in their work accompanying other individuals or groups.



WORKSHOP

RISK ASSESSMENT

General recommendations for the workshop:

BEFORE

- Have a safe space to work.
- Have knowledge of the group or people you will work with.
- Try to learn about the context.
- Prepare an agenda and/or descriptive letter (topics, hours, activity or technique, materials, facilitation).

UPON CONCLUDING:

- The material (flipcharts, cards, etc.) is given to the participants; this is unless they have agreed that the facilitator will take it to write a report but with the commitment of returning it. It is necessary to be careful when handling this information, as it could be sensitive.
- Together, define how follow-up will be provided.
- Hold a meeting afterwards to see progress and, if necessary, decide if there will be another workshop.

DURING:

- It is best for two people to facilitate.
- Build trust with the person/people with whom you will work. Handle the information with secrecy. Mention that all the material that is developed belongs to the person/people who are at risk and that they will decide what to do with it.
- Take measures during the workshop: do not bring in cell phones or take them apart (take out the battery and chip). If someone is expecting an urgent call, put the phone outside of the space where the ringtone can still be heard.
- Channel what participants share—don't lose sight of the workshop's objective.
- Be careful to avoid making value judgements or labeling a reaction. Do not impose your own opinion; that is, do not influence. Do invite reflection.
- No opinion should be discarded—recover them. Be careful not to minimize opinions.
- Share and receive.
- Respect that the decisions must be made by the person/people or group.
- Agree that the facilitators and the group will take co-responsibility for the space.
- The facilitator will be careful not to create false expectations about the tools that are shared.
- It is important to suggest to the workshop participants (political subjects) that they are the ones who shall gather the agreements, tasks, pending matters, etc. for their own follow-up process. This helps to strengthen the sense of co-responsibility and the importance of assuming their own process.

OBJECTIVE: present and share workshop expectations.

- Understand the importance of assessing risk from a framework of sociopolitical violence.
- Understand why it is important to assess risk from the psychosocial approach.



Welcome participants and present the workshop objective(s). (Remember that the activities included in this material can be done together, as a workshop, or separately, according to the needs that are being addressed.)

Some of the general points and conditions to be careful about during the workshop are explained as presented in the section above.

The facilitators and participants introduce themselves, and they are also asked to share their expectations for the workshop or exercise that they are going to do.

Next, the facilitators share that the tools and/or methodologies that will be used have been developed by human rights defenders and organizations around the world, that they have been nourished by their experiences, and that some have also been adapted to respond to the situation of the people with whom they work.

As part of the expectations, it is very important to clarify that the facilitator is not there to tell the group what to do about their risk(s), but rather that the members of the collective themselves are who will reflect and reach conclusions about what they will do. Place emphasis on this being shared work that requires participation; this will help develop an acceptable plan/course of action for security. The facilitator's role is to encourage reflection and to gather, organize, and return these opinions and proposals. The final decision is left up to the person/people at risk.



Exercise 1.

INTRODUCTION AND EXPECTATIONS

Topic 1. Why Should We Talk about Security from a Psychosocial Approach in Contexts of Sociopolitical Violence?

When talking about security, it is necessary to begin by acknowledging that sociopolitical violence is orchestrated through **political repression**⁵ using acts such as political imprisonment, torture, displacement, or enforced disappearance, for example. These repressive acts are expressed in the actions of police and military systems as well as in **impunity**, which enables conditions of insecurity, the loss of control, and the imposition of a single concept of security (from a militarized and police perspective), thus allowing political subjects and society at large to be stripped of their autonomy and capacity to organize themselves. With the exercises below, we intend to share tools so that political subjects might develop the conditions for addressing risks and reflecting on their importance, taking the development of a preventative and reactive security strategy into their own hands, with autonomy and in accordance with their varied physical, psycho-emotional, political, and organizational needs.

Aims of political repression:

- To break the collective and solidary fabric.
- To control the internal enemy.
- To intimidate the population.
- To introduce impunity.
- To transform the population.

⁵ Beristain, C. (1993). Resistencia y afirmación. [Resistance and Affirmation] Barcelona: Editorial Virus. .

*Exercise 2.***DIALOGUE ABOUT SECURITY**

OBJECTIVE: Explore the experience, the level of information, and the tools that participants have in terms of security.

**30 min**

Whether among people from the same organization or with those whom we are accompanying, it is important to take a moment at the beginning of the workshop to reflect on what they understand security to be in order to start on common ground and establish what angle we propose to take when carrying out the analysis.

The dialogue can be done in small groups or in a plenary session, depending on the workshop objectives and the group's characteristics.

Questions for reflection:

- What makes me feel safe and secure?
- What do we understand security to be?
- Which elements do we consider indispensable for thinking about security within the organization?
- What do we need in order to feel safe when doing our defense work?

If this activity is done in small groups, hold a plenary session afterwards to share the experiences. Any type of material can be used to record the responses, or they can be stated directly as a brainstorming activity during the plenary session.



Topic 2. Security Strategy

As part of the workshop, we believe it is important to frame risk assessment as a tool that contributes to the input for the security strategy. In this section, we explain some of the general elements to consider in order to carry out the assessment.

When we talk about **security** from a psychosocial approach, and specifically from Aluna's experience, we refer to the set of practices, reflections, strategies, and **protection** measures (preventive and reactive) that individuals, organizations, collectives, and communities (political subjects) develop in accordance with the different levels of **risk** that they are exposed to because of their actions when demanding or defending human rights. This set of practices aims to reach an acceptable level of security and, in addition, from the psychosocial approach, to regain the control that has been partially lost due to fear, uncertainty, distress, a lack of cohesion in the group, the absence of channels and mechanisms for decision-making, or authoritarian attitudes, among others, that position individuals and groups differently in the face of the risk, situations of violence, and repressive acts. In this sense, protection refers to the specific application of preventative measures and the ways of reacting that make it possible for defenders to maintain the conditions needed to carry on with their work.

This is the set of reflections, practices, and specific measures combined with other organizational and political elements from organizations and collectives that we call **security and protection strategy**. It entails a collective effort to analyze the different risks that human rights defenders face on individual and organizational levels in relation to the work they do as well as the concrete needs that they identify for continuing their work. This is why strengthening the field of security is a key element within the psychosocial approach.

In this way, the approach contributes elements for understanding the context of violence as well as the actors involved in it. At the same time, it allows for working with psychosocial impacts and strengthening coping mechanisms so that the security strategy is not an end in itself but rather a cross-cutting focal point for strengthening political subjects and minimizing the risks they face.

In the table below, we present some components from the security strategy that have been adapted to Aluna's psychosocial accompaniment model; each organization, collective, or community can add elements and practices to this proposal that have worked in their experience or that they believe could work.

SECURITY STRATEGY			
Internal Dynamics	Political Project	Psycho-Emotional	Security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power relations, structure, and internal functions mark security dynamics • Response capacity, decision-making, and handling of information on the issue • We are all responsible for the issue of security • It is important to define specific tasks and roles. • Strategy for handling communication and information (physical and digital) • Clear channels of communication inside and outside of the organization • Build clear mechanisms for addressing internal conflicts that may be a result of the situation of risk • Allocate resources and capacities to the issue of security and prevention • Ongoing education and training for the entire team based on the detection of needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a culture of security and protection as part of strengthening defense work • Collective reflection on the relationship between security and the organization's ethical-political orientation • Assessment of political-strategic alliances (on local, municipal, state, federal, and international levels) • Identity, autonomy, and self-determination of peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This includes physical and emotional health on individual and collective levels • This involves co-responsibility from the staff, the members, and the institution. For example: Have a mental health policy and tools for collective care • In the risk assessment, devote spaces to dialoguing about these impacts • The management of security-related tools should consider the different levels of knowledge and awareness existing about the issue among staff members in order to avoid or lessen frustration • Managing stress and tiredness can be a way to prevent situations of risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic analysis of the context (actor map, risk assessment, strategy review) • Documentation and systematization of incidents (recording and analysis) • Planning action strategies when facing incidents • Design of a protection plan (preventive and reactive) • Support network for reaction and prevention (public and political advocacy, trusted media outlets, legal access, and specialists on diverse subject-matters: medicine, psychology, and technical topics, among others). • Development of preventive and action measures

Topic 3. Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a process that consists of analyzing different components of security in relation to a specific objective within the organization; this may be as general or specific as required by the needs of the moment at hand. Yet, the psychosocial perspective broadens its elements of analysis, also including those that make up the known risk formula (see page 40) and other aspects of the psychosocial approach such as the impacts and coping mechanisms that we find in the psycho-emotional fields, the political project, and the internal dynamics. Risk is not only physical and does not only threaten freedom and integrity; there are also other non-visible types of harm that disrupt multiple aspects of personal and organizational life. Providing evidence of those other impacts and analyzing them is part of approaching security comprehensively.

This assessment represents the basis for defining the strategy and the security measures adapted to the individual, organization, collective, community, or even the network. It is not a static exercise, provided that it depends on the situation in which it is done and because it changes over time, which is why it should be reevaluated periodically. Ideally, all those involved in the organizational process should participate.

We propose the term **risk assessment** because in many situations it is not possible to conduct an analysis in great depth or there is not enough time beforehand to make decisions; not to mention, we acknowledge that we never have all the information when we begin the process. This is also because we are actually using this information to approach the risk without having absolute certainty about it. Approaching it in this way allows us to appraise it and, based on this appraisal, we determine our actions. The key to the assessment is to carefully examine the information, visualizing different scenarios and weighing distinct variables that can give us an advantage or diminish it. It is about acting based on what is analyzed, with what is at hand and with what is possible. If the elements of the psychosocial approach are added to classic elements of analyzing/assessing risk, the perspective is broadened, and therefore, the measures reach further to form a comprehensive strategy in which the physical and psycho-emotional support each other.

Occasionally, great expectations are placed on the work done with risks; however, only approaching it from security limits the multiple actions that could be done and/or strengthened if other aspects are also taken into consideration. In addition to this, the psychosocial approach contributes critical thinking to the notion of the infallibility of security measures and plans; consequently, it becomes necessary to stop in order to comprehend, to stop in order to take some distance, to stop in order to “realize,” to stop in order to be able to act.



These are some important considerations for carrying out a risk assessment:

- The time and conditions available for the process, because often we do not have enough resources, information, or time, which is why the activities should be adapted to the specific situations of the assessment process.
- Occasionally, it is necessary to seek outside help for analyzing some of the risks from a perspective that is more corporal and/or therapeutic or, if necessary, even spiritual, in addition to being analytic.
- It is important to always do the assessment with those who are being directly affected since they are the ones who have the elements that are needed to carry out the assessment. When necessary, it is important to find a moment to share information with the organization that is being accompanied or with the organization's governing body (agree on which information with the person/people) in order to follow up on certain agreements or needs.
- Systematically recording the **security incidents** is recommended as an important part of the assessment.
- Those who carry out the assessment are responsible for the results and decisions made when applying the methodologies.
- Have clarity about what each tool is and what its purpose is.
- When assessing risk, establish the objective for the analysis or what it is based upon. For example, if it is to reduce a risk (or multiple risks); to identify if there is a risk involved in an activity or strategy; to analyze whether it is advisable to accompany a case; or to find out if the proposed strategies for the case could put those involved at risk, etc. Then, a security and protection plan or course of action can be developed, identifying which issues to strengthen within the organization and that they will require their own plan.
- In times of emergency, sometimes the event that took place is all that is analyzed without going into great detail about the context or past incidents. Ask what they think could happen, go over what has been done, and identify what can be activated.
- Likewise, the usefulness of the methodology could depend on the actors with whom it is analyzed, and it can be adapted accordingly without losing sight of the objective of the analysis.

The risk assessment process involves analyzing a variety of elements, which we will explore in the exercises below: the context analysis (exploring the reality, the analysis of the political project, and the analysis of the actors), incident analysis, threat analysis, and the risk formula from the psychosocial approach.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The context analysis is an exercise that should be done periodically in order to update the security strategy in accordance with the changes that take place within the territories, the conditions that defenders face, and the needs that arise within the organizations regarding their political work, the contexts of violence they find themselves in, and the reconfiguration of the actors who exercise that violence.

We begin with an exploration of the reality, that is, by overviewing what is happening in the political, economic, and social scenarios where the defenders work. Afterwards, we review the objectives for the work they are carrying out and their implications within the context that we are analyzing to finally map out the actors and their strategies that are in favor of or against the work of the political subjects with whom we are doing the analysis.



Exercise 3.

EXPLORATION OF THE REALITY

OBJECTIVE: Understand what is happening in the political, social, and economic scenarios (etc.) where rights are being defended, where there is a social struggle, where the work is being done.



1 hr 30 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers, and
masking tape

If the analysis will be done with people whom we accompany, before beginning with the context, it is crucial to ask what they imagine about the subject of security and protection. This helps provide an overall idea of how the people are situated before the issue and the context where they carry out their work. This is in addition to starting to identify the risk they are running in a certain time and space, which leads to challenges and decisions for safeguarding psychosocial integrity.

TECHNIQUE: “Brainstorm”

The facilitator asks, “Why do you believe it is important to talk about the context when addressing the risk?” Opinions are heard and gone over.

If the work is done with accompanied people, it will likely only be necessary to receive an update on the context with the understanding that the accompanying organization is already familiar with it. If it is done with people from the same organization, it is important to do this exercise as a way of updating and collectivizing the information related to the context.

Asking ***prompting questions*** is quite helpful. For example:

- **Are there issues (such as the stances, laws, actions, or omissions of State and non-State actors) that could affect our work or our social struggle?**
- **What is happening in terms of justice? Is there social organization? How are the police or military forces acting?**
- **How is this affecting us? Is it the same for the women as it is for the men?**

The opinions are written down on the flipcharts. If necessary, the facilitator can ask questions to complete the information.

At the end, a summary is made of all that was said. It helps to organize the information and clearly present it to the participants, trying to identify the challenges that are present in their work or social struggle.

**METHODOLOGICAL
SUGGESTION**

Before the workshop/meeting, it is advisable to do research on the reality of those with whom the work will be done. This will support question formulation when doing the exercise. Occasionally, participants forget to provide some of the information.

It is particularly necessary to consider the implications of defense work in order to identify our exposure to different levels of risk, their characteristics, the point where they originate, and the different ways these risks affect us depending on the issue we are working with, the specific activities we carry out, and the context we find ourselves in, among other elements that make it possible for us to develop a security strategy based on the particular needs of each collective.

Being a rights defender means challenging the ideological, economic, political-military, and psychological strategy deployed by the State and by de facto powers, both legal (companies) and illegal (organized crime)—a strategy through which violence and repression are exercised against dissidents and social movements and through which the regulatory framework is employed and modified to legitimize dispossession, to legalize attacks on civil society.⁶

As previously mentioned, we use the perspective of **intersectionality** proposed by feminism to form a situated interpretation, which invites us to consider the different systems of oppression that intersect the defenders' personal stories and the specific risks they are exposed to as a result of them; that is, the risks associated with gender, ethnical origin, social class, and age, among others. For example, a threat will impact an indigenous defender differently than it will a defender from the city, and at the same time, the conditions for coping will be different depending on their financial status, support network, and belief system. This is not only true when dealing with risks but also when it comes to the sources of motivation, such as: indigenous, women's, and youth movements, etc. and everything that gives meaning to political subjects.

In this way, reflecting on the objective of the work that organizations do—including the element of intersectionality—can help to:

- Recognize the contributions they make to social transformation, both individually and collectively in the contexts that are closest to them, and how this relates to their exposure to risks as defenders.
- Clarify the shared objectives and expectations within the organization in order to make them the basis of the security strategy.
- Analyze the strategies they use to reach their objectives and the role that each person plays in these strategies in order to determine the level of risk and responsibility they have within the organization.

6 Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial, A.C. (2019). *If not us as women, who? If not now, when?*, Mexico: Aluna, p. 9. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3q3UUVC>.

Exercise 4.

ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL PROJECT: OUR WORK / OUR SOCIAL STRUGGLE

OBJECTIVE: To reflect on the possibility that the activities we do could compromise our security and to identify the risks that are involved or could be involved.



45 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers, and
masking tape

It's necessary to link the previous exercise of exploring the reality to the work or social struggle that is being carried out. Highlight that, within this reality, they are political subjects and that this is where they do rights defense work or resist and fight in the face of a certain situation.

Ask accordingly:

- **Organization/collective**
- **Accompanied people (individuals or families)**

- What is the objective or mission of your organization or collective?
- What activities and/or strategies do you carry out to meet your objective?
- What do you intend to transform?
- Why are you fighting as part of your social struggle? What do you want to achieve?
- What actions have you carried out?
- How do certain actors react to our work or social struggle? What interests and strategies are involved? What has happened in similar situations?
- At what points are there greater possibilities of suffering an act of aggression?
- In addition to security, what else has been affected by this context and these actors? For example, strategic vision, ideals, stances, personal connections, emotional well-being, etc.

On the flipchart, write down what is being shared. Separately, take note of the risks produced by the activities and/or strategies that have been put into action. It is important to stress that the issue of risk causes psycho-emotional impacts, whether because it means having to relive situations of this nature that the individuals, organization, or collective have experienced or because the context tends to become so adverse that it can bring about fear, frustration, powerlessness, a lack of perspective, or greater exposure to risks, among

KEY QUESTIONS

Why are we working on the issue of security and to what end?

What do the different levels of risk depend on?

other responses. It is important to talk about these matters in order to gather them together, explain them, and work on them. Doing a risk assessment is an opportunity to reflect on the needs surrounding mental health, among other issues, that would be relevant to address in a process of organizational strengthening.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Most of the time, we are not aware of the work we do, and it is advisable to continuously reflect on the impact of our activities so we can take preventive measures. The facilitator will be careful to avoid producing a sense of fear; it is necessary to mention that not all the activities put them at risk, but that they must identify the ones that do and work on them.

Exercise 5.

ACTOR MAP AND ANALYSIS

OBJECTIVE: To identify the actors who are against our objectives and interested in provoking some type of harm and what elements they have to do this.



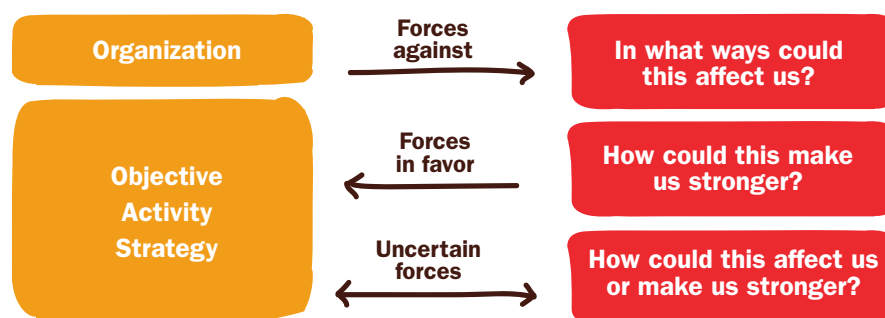
2 hours

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers,
sheets of paper,
round labels,
colored thread,
cards/drawings by
people,
masking tape

EXERCISE A) "Arrows"

The scheme below is used to take note of the actors who are against or in favor of participants' work or social struggle or those who have an uncertain stance before it.



EXERCISE B) “Listing Actor”

Beforehand, cut colored sheets of paper the size of one-fourth the size of a full sheet. One color and a single sheet of paper will be used for each actor.

After the actors are written down on the corresponding colored papers, they are asked to discuss and agree about each actor:

Against: What type of actor is it (State or non-State)? Do they belong to an institution or group? What are each group’s interests? What do they want to harm and what strategies do they have for doing so? The round colored labels will be used for this part of the exercise to place the interest and the harm as well as the strategy for doing harm.

In favor: What type of actor is it (State or non-State)? Do they belong to an organization, institution, or collective? In what way do they support us or strengthen us? What is our connection like?

This analysis could be broadened by identifying the power relations that tie each actor with another/others, or in other words, what moves one actor to form alliances with another (interest networks and partnerships)?

EXERCISE C) “Drawings of people”

Cards with drawings of people are used for this exercise. For example: a leader, a priest, a politician, a municipal agent, an agent of the public ministry, an expert, a doctor, neighbors, an armed man, a tribal/community leader, a lawyer, a soldier, etc. There should be a number of generic characters.

The person/people who are doing their analysis are asked to choose the characters who they might assume could harm them in some way. After selecting them, they will give one or more names to this generic person. For example, if they took a politician card, there will surely be more than one, and they will need to write down their names (the most advisable is that one person’s name is written down on each paper). And it might be that on another of the selected cards, it will only be necessary to write down one name.

Presentation of the actor map.

The work that has been done is presented. Afterwards, the facilitator asks:

- How is it helpful to see the map of actors in a graphic form? What can you draw from it? Are you missing information?
- Can you identify any harm that these actors have caused you? What about to your organization?
- What is the aim of causing you harm?
- Can you take action against one of the actors, confronting the strategies they use to harm you? What would you do?

METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR MAPPING OUT ACTORS

Before starting, it is necessary to define what issue will be used to map the actors. At the end of the previous exercise, the facilitator asked if there was a specific activity that could have triggered the situation of risk. This can be considered to identify the actors who will be included in the analysis. However, if the interest is in taking preventative action, picture probable scenarios of risk. Now is the time to agree about whether the assessment will be done based on the organization's general objective (mission) or if they want to limit it to a specific activity or strategy.

The result of the mapping exercise will be different depending on the objective that is analyzed. That is, the actors may be different if the map is made based on the organization's general objective (it will be a very broad map) compared to if it is done based on the objective of a project, an activity, or a strategy (it will be more focused). It's possible that some actors will be present in each one or that some might change. Therefore, it is important to define it.

Regardless of the technique used, it is necessary to mention that:

- They should try to identify and state the first and last name and/or position of the perpetrators (especially if they are authorities).

If possible, identify the following for each actor:

- What alliances they have and what type of power sustains them.
- The strategies they use.
- Whether or not they have an image of legitimacy and legality.
- If they don't hesitate to exercise some type of violence (political, economic, iconographic / use of images or symbols, verbal, armed, etc.) to achieve what they want.
- Anything else?

CLOSING REFLECTION*(Regardless of the technique used)*

In the psychosocial approach, mapping out the context and actors is key to knowing what and whom we are facing when defending rights. It is also important because, in a way, it returns our understanding of what is happening in the history of the country and, in particular, of the specific region of the actors that can harm us; it enables us to start analyzing the sociopolitical violence, to identify their modus operandi and, especially, the aim they are pursuing before the different expressions of opposition to this power. A violent act is loaded with a great deal of confusion because it happens unexpectedly; a loss of control and uncertainty about life comes with what happens. Therefore, it is a matter of getting beyond the confusion and using tools to interpret what is happening and understanding it better. This starts to give us more certainty and helps regain us control of the situation. Remember that one of the aims of sociopolitical violence is to cause confusion, uncertainty, and fear, among other negative effects. Doing this analysis makes it possible to visualize this intent and comprehend its scope. Using an orderly approach to see what is happening in the context helps contribute to counteracting it.

Mapping out the actors with the greatest detail possible will help us focus on whom we should gear our strategies toward, with the possibility of deterring the actor from going through with an attack on us. As with context, it is vital to analyze the actors on a periodic basis, because they are also dynamic. Allied actors or even actors among the authorities themselves might be identified, or it is possible that allied actors could morph into opposing actors, or the presence of new actors could be identified, making it necessary to learn more about them—to not only know their names but also know who they are, who they hang around with, what resources they have available to them, and how they do things.

Reviewing the reflection from the previous exercise, the actor map and analysis allows us to identify those who have harmful interests and who are against the defenders' work, which is why they can represent a source of threat. Likewise, participants can recognize actors who share their affinities and could be part of their support network. Finally, actors can be considered whose role seems uncertain or not very clear: they must be monitored in order to gain certainty about their behavior in the future. In this analysis, from the psychosocial approach, actors' actions can have consequences, not only on security, but also on the political project, internal dynamics, and the psycho-emotional well-being of the political subjects. To understand how violence operates and the impacts it produces, it is necessary to analyze who causes it and their intentions.

In this section, we suggest three options for mapping out actors. The selection of the exercise will depend on the number of people who are participating in the workshop, their available time, and their objective for doing it. The facilitator will see what is more fitting or even if there might be a different technique that can be used.

ANALYSIS OF SECURITY AND THREAT INCIDENTS



In the psychosocial approach to a risk assessment, it is key to talk about both the individual and collective impacts brought about by the situation, which is why time should be set aside to do so and care should be taken not to open issues or situations that position people in greater vulnerability or at a level of vulnerability that they do not know how to handle. For example, be careful not to minimize or maximize the situations and to avoid invasive or overprotective attitudes. A better option is to maintain an attitude that makes it possible to listen to what is shared; let people flow in their own time and way (without forcing them with questions in moments of silence), not by deciding what is best for them or overwhelming them with a host of actions.

When reconstructing situations of violence, it is recurring and normal for pain and fear to arise from what has been experienced. Here, it is necessary to treat what the person/people are sharing with empathy, sensitivity, and a sense of humanity. Rationality gives way to emotions, and sometimes there is fear about facilitating this in happening because of a belief that it gets into the terrain of psychological care. The psychosocial approach questions this belief because we think skills can be developed for facing these painful moments, listening, and validating the testimony, emotions, and reactions that they produce. Attentive listening will make it possible to connect and take on a respectful attitude toward the pain, like, for example, accepting silences. Listening will allow those who are carrying out the assessment to provide a structured order for what is shared to explain what happened but also to support the process of resignifying and transforming amid the chaos caused by sociopolitical violence.

Here, elements of the risk assessment start to be interwoven with the psycho-emotional—that is, what is felt, thought, or believed when facing the harm, realizing that it has an explanation and origin. Risk assessment contributes to people’s rebuilding if it aims to strengthen them as political subjects and is careful not to revictimize them. With this in mind, we know it is a challenge to classify risk assessment, as there will be issues that cannot be worked on at the time of the workshop due to the complexity involved and the level of intervention they would require. It is indispensable to take all of this into account, as risk assessment generally aims to address immediate needs that could put the lives or liberties of the political subjects in danger; in some cases, they are those related to the threats or incidents associated with their defense work.

Because of this, we share tools for recording and analyzing the incidents and threats as part of the risk assessment. It should be considered that, in addition to the impacts that are inherent in these situations, others may appear that need a more planned and in-depth accompaniment process along with the need for psychotherapeutic, medical, or psychiatric intervention, depending on the level of the emotional effects and always with clarity about when not to pathologize⁷ the political subjects, which is why there should be consideration for the possible impacts that need another type of support and care to complement what can be offered through the psychosocial approach. If this is the case, have options on hand so you can suggest where they can turn.

⁷ Diagnosing a person’s behavior or reaction that is considered “abnormal” and associating it with conditions that may require medication.

Exercise 6.

ANALYSIS OF SECURITY INCIDENTS

OBJECTIVE: To comprehend and identify what a security incident is.



1 hr. 30 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers,
1/4-sheet papers,
masking tape

The facilitator asks if there is a notion of what a security incident is and then shares the definition, which can be supported by some examples: a stranger comes up and makes intimidating comments, photos or videos are taken, written messages or images that are symbolic of or allude to some type of violence, monitoring, surveillance, messages from third parties, theft of devices (cell phones, cameras, recorders, USB drives), information theft, intervention in communications (cell phones, computer), etc. The incidents will be analyzed on a timeline, and it will be necessary to remember the analysis period (years and months) leading up to the point that the person/people suffered the threat or attack that is the object of the risk assessment. The time will be defined according to the needs; however, we suggest that it is no longer than one year.



On the one-fourth-sheet papers, participants will write down the incidents that have happened to them or someone close to them (organization, movement, family). One paper will be used per incident, and they will be placed on the timeline according to the corresponding year or month. It is not necessary to remember the exact day, but they should recall the approximate month that it happened.

The facilitator reads each paper, removing any repeated ones, and can request an explanation of the event that took place or ask about anything that is unclear. At the same time, notes about the risks and threats that are being identified can be written on the flipchart.

When the interpretation is finished, the following questions can be asked:

What does the exercise make you think about?

What do you think the incidents mean?

At what point have you felt more afraid? Has it grown worse?

Who might have caused these incidents? Do you suspect a certain actor?

How was the situation faced? What else can be done?

Afterwards, the facilitator integrates other elements that might not have been seen. It can be helpful to integrate other reflections about the context, the actors, the ways they have come about, the intensity, the time that passed between one incident and another, a gender-related component. The idea is to somehow reconstruct how the threat or attack in question was reached.

The facilitator might identify an incident that is not necessarily a risk. In this case, use questions to encourage reflection from participants.

Draw the group's attention to what has been written on the flipchart: the risks and threats. Explain that the incidents are concrete acts that translate into a specific threat or risk and that it is necessary to work on them from a preventative approach. Highlight the emotions that arise and how they relate to the actors' aim for exercising violence. One of these emotions might be fear, which can grow if the political subjects suffer too many incidents. Analyze their content, text, symbols, form, etc., and cross examine them with assumptions of who might be causing them and to what end. This will enable them to position the fear in the right dimension.

CLOSING REFLECTION ON THE INCIDENT ANALYSIS

- It is very important to share the incidents, keep a record of them, and analyze them as a set (within the organization, movement, or family). It helps if the record is simple and includes basic information such as date, time, place, what happened, to whom, what they did. Keep in mind that there are incidents that are harder to identify, which is in contrast to some that are quite evident.

- Constant communication helps in learning to identify them. It requires practice, “seeing” in greater depth, and reconstructing them in such a way that no memory is left out. Everything is important.
- These incidents are an indicator that our work has been effective. They are also a stoplight that tells us if a situation could become dangerous and whether measures should be taken immediately or if they should be relaxed, without abandoning them.
- Most incidents are caused by outside actors, but there are also incidents that can be caused by our oversights that we don’t think could put ourselves or others at risk. Generally speaking, they are habits and practices that we must make an effort to change. Accordingly, dialogue will be important for finding out why they are not being fulfilled; if there is weariness, if there some kind of opposition that has not been expressed, etc.
- It’s important to understand the difference between a security incident and a threat, in that all threats are security incidents but not every incident is a threat.
- Analyzing the incidents together with elements such as the context and the actors will rule out scenarios that could be causing a great deal of fear but that are not necessarily a risk, or it will identify high-risk scenarios that may not be causing fear.

Now, the incident process can be complemented by the threat analysis, and they can be done simultaneously or separately. However, analyzing the threats beforehand helps to see how the attack was constructed and how the announcement of harm became an explicit threat. Remember, from the psychosocial approach, it is essential to analyze the relationship between the elements of the risk assessment and the psychosocial impacts. Accordingly, before analyzing the incidents and threats, it is necessary to identify if the fear that is being experienced is disproportionate; if so, it will be better to first work on the fear, as will be addressed below.

Exercise 7.

THREAT ANALYSIS⁸

OBJECTIVE: To understand what a threat is and offer elements for analyzing it.



45 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers,
colored 1/4-sheet
papers,
masking tape

To begin facilitating, explain what a threat is. It's necessary to distinguish between threats that are directed at an individual, which have an aim, intent, and can be done directly (to the person in question) or indirectly (to people who are close to the organization, the resistance movement, or to the family), and there are other threats that are contextual, that is, tied to the setting of sociopolitical violence where the work is being done.

There are six elements for analyzing a **threat**. The participants will be asked to answer six questions about the threat. The different colored cards will be used for this exercise (one for each question):

- **Gather facts.** What happened? When? Where? How did the events take place? Who was involved? What type of threat was it? Was there a violent gender-based component? This is the description of what took place and not a single detail should be omitted.
- **Determine if there is a pattern.** Have references of the previously occurring threats: Is it possible to identify shared elements? Moments (time, space, an activity period), means used to do it, similar words and/or symbols, gender-based messages, etc.
- **Assume the objective or intention of the person/people who are making the threat.** What do they want to achieve?
- **Identify the source of the threat.** Who is/are behind it? It's easier if there is a habit of analyzing the actors as it delimits and specifies the possibilities of identifying the person/people who are trying to do harm.

⁸ Based on the methodology for analyzing threats proposed by Protection International at: <https://bit.ly/3mwengP>

- **Evaluate the probability of an attack.** Can the identified source of the probable threat carry out the attack? What resources do they have to carry it out? What do we do or not do that gives them the opportunity to act? All the elements should be considered together in order to reach a conclusion. It may be that those who are the object of the threat do not agree on their interpretations of the threat; if so, it is better to think of how to take action in the worst-case scenario.
- It is advisable to explore how we experience the threat; each person's perception is valid and important. Here are some questions that help with this: What happened to my body, ideas, emotions, beliefs when I experienced this threat? How does it affect us?
- **React.** What will we decide to do?

The exercise is concluded. The facilitator asks what the final conclusion is and how it was reached. If something was not clear, individual or collective reflection should be encouraged in order to incorporate all of the components that were posed in the previous steps. If an analysis has been overlooked, the facilitator could pose it as a question in order to address it.

CLOSING REFLECTION FOR THE THREAT ANALYSIS

- Threat is the usual and easiest way for opposing actors to put a stop to rights defense, and this always impacts the person at the receiving end. Part of the aim is to inspire fear, to paralyze, create confusion, and that's why it's important to analyze it in order to see if there are enough elements to carry it out.
- In order to carry out this analysis, there should be enough verified information; however, this will not always be possible, and the work and speculation must be done with what is available. This also creates clarity around what we need to know about ourselves along with our "opportunity areas" or weaknesses.
- Don't lose sight of how the threats are demonstrated for women versus for men. For women, they are focused on personal life, on the role they "must" fulfill, on the control and humiliation tied to their bodies, on sexuality. For men, their "bravery" and ability to protect others is brought into question; it is a test of "how much they can take."

SITUATED INTERPRETATION OF RISK

The risk formula does not suffice for carrying out an analysis from the psychosocial approach; however, it helps us synthesize and see what specific vulnerabilities and capacities we have in relation to the threat and risk in a concrete way. This is why we propose supplementing the analysis by also addressing the impacts and coping mechanisms that are associated with the vulnerabilities and capacities explored during the exercise.

Remember that when we say “impacts” we are referring to the losses, negative effects, or abrupt changes brought about by border-line situations in different settings and levels of political subjects’ lives, while coping mechanisms are related to the responses or reactions to sociopolitical violence that are tied to caring for life, integrity, and dignity. Coping mechanisms tend to be harder to identify because the reactions or responses in these types of situations are often perceived or experienced from a place of judgement.

Exercise 8.

RISK FORMULA⁹

OBJECTIVE: To understand what risk is and also see what comprises it and where action can be taken.

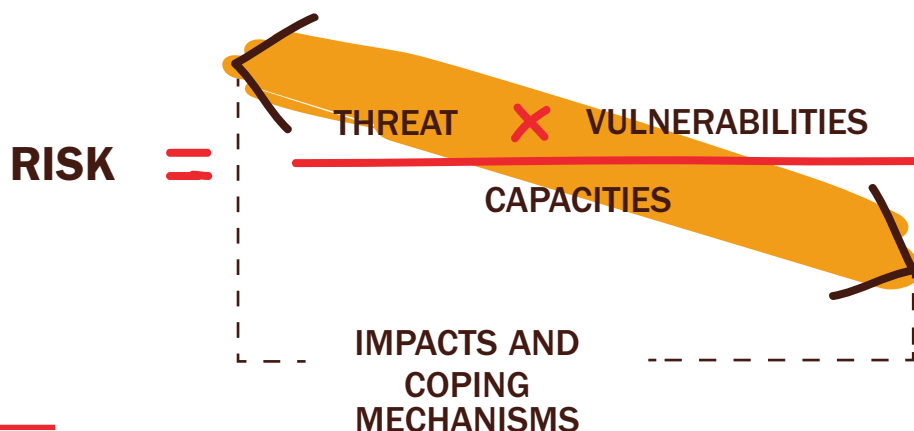


3 hr 30 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers,
1/4-sheet papers,
masking tape

It begins with the explanation of what **risk** is and the following formula is presented:



⁹ Adapted risk formula from Protection International's original formula:
<https://bit.ly/3yvTRRY>

The facilitator revisits the definition of a threat and shares the concepts of vulnerability and capacity. The concepts could be made visible, written on a flipchart or whiteboard. The risk formula is a representation which says that the risk—that is, the possibility that harm will take place—depends not only on the threat but also on our own weaknesses and strengths in relation to the specific threat. Therefore, vulnerabilities should be reduced and capacities, increased so that the threat is not fulfilled or to lessen its impact. To do so, we have to know what threats the identification of vulnerabilities and capacities will be based on. Work could be done on the threat that is the object of the risk assessment as well as those that surfaced in the security incident exercise if there is time to do so. If there are too many, it may be impossible; if necessary, prioritize which ones to work on.

It is not easy to prioritize; yet it's important to reach a consensus to the extent that it is possible. The facilitator could open a discussion space to make the decision. What elements could be used to prioritize?: The probability that each threat will take place, the aggressor's capacity, and the impact or harm that could be caused.

The risk level can be evaluated as:

HIGH There would be irreversible or excessive harm within different dimensions (physical, psycho-emotional, political, material, spiritual integrity) on an individual and/or collective level. The sociopolitical repression is so intense that the political project and beliefs lose their meaning. The work could be completely or significantly paralyzed. The risk could not be assumed.

MEDIUM There would be partial harm but with the possibility of maintaining the organization's political and strategic project, of demanding rights, or maintaining resistance. The risk can be assumed.

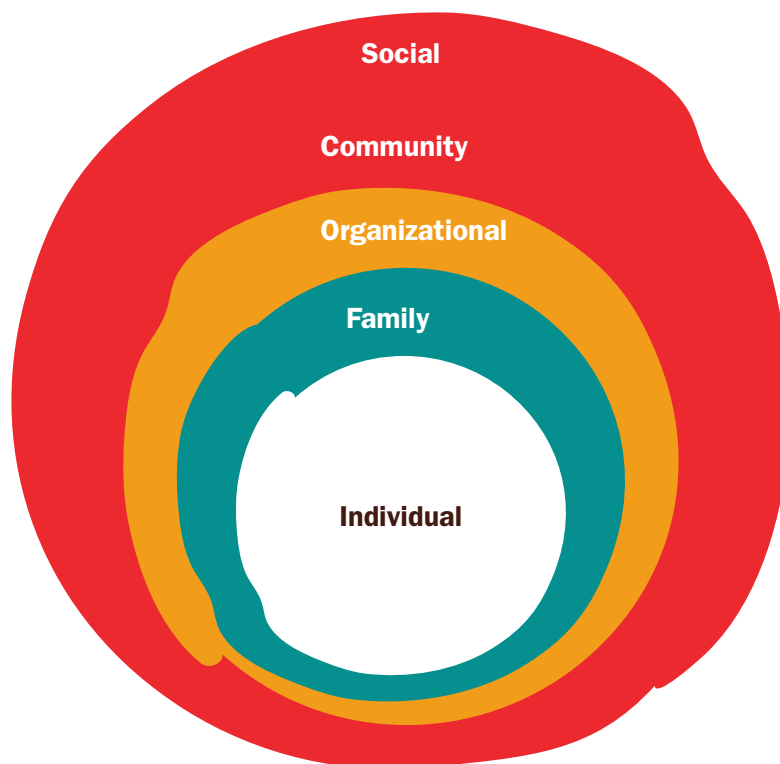
LOW It does not affect integrity or the political projects and/or strategies, but there is psycho-emotional harm that, if not addressed, could affect the internal dynamics of the organization, movement, or family later on. The risk can be assumed.

After prioritizing, there should be a focus on identifying the **vulnerabilities and capacities** of each threat. The facilitator mentions that both the vulnerabilities and the capacities are factors that can be controlled, and that it is in our hands to modify them. Perhaps some vulnerabilities and capacities are repeated in another threat because they are linked to each other. Participants will be asked to fill in the chart from the appendix.

Like for the vulnerabilities and capacities, a space will be opened to speak about impacts and coping mechanisms. Considering the dimensions from the psychosocial accompaniment model that we explained at the beginning of this guide, participants will be asked to identify the impacts brought about by the threat that they have selected for the exercise according to each level (individual, family, organizational, community, and social), as well as the ways they could face the situation. Both will be placed on the diagram shown below using cards of two different colors to differentiate between them. These are some key questions in this exercise:

Impacts: What emotions, thoughts, or actions do you identify that you experienced in this situation? How were they expressed? How did they affect the dynamics or work of the collective or group? Does what happen put objectives or work strategies into question? Were the relationships within the collective or organization affected in some way?

Coping mechanisms: How did you respond to the situation? Do you have some type of support, inside or outside of the organization, to respond? Do you have some sort of connection (internal or external) that strengthened after the threat? What mechanisms do you identify within the organization or collective that allowed you to respond? What elements from your daily work remain in spite of the threat?



Both parts of the previously completed work are presented. The facilitator highlights the participants' reflections. This is a time for revisiting the elements that were worked on earlier. The person/people at risk do their own assessment, analyzing all of its components. Opinions may differ, but what is essential is that they are able to carry out a collective assessment by weighing the individual perceptions with the group dialogue and also by seeing where they have to focus their efforts in order to lessen weaknesses and build capacities. Naming the impacts that this threat (or threats) has caused and recognizing the different ways they have been able to face the situation also contributes to reducing the risk and identifying the moments of opportunity for possible attacks. The role of facilitating is about supporting this reworking by seeing how certain emotions, actions, or thoughts have a meaning that is different from what they mean in a situation of sociopolitical violence. In this context, they intensify, taking on another dimension that can be overbearing. It may be that a certain impact is recurring or very internalized in most of the collective, which is why it is advisable to focus on talking about it, but this is only possible if the facilitator has the necessary tools. An alternative would be to look for another type of intervention in order to address it. Nevertheless, we must remember that the mere act of naming it is deeply meaningful and opens the possibility of transforming it.

CLOSING REFLECTION FOR THE RISK ASSESSMENT

It is important to keep in mind that there are different ways of facing risk and the impacts of sociopolitical violence:

- a) Accept it and reduce it. Stress the source of the threat and build capacities in order to reduce vulnerabilities.
- b) Avoid it. For example, by lowering one's profile, suspending or changing certain activities, hiding, or temporarily leaving the area, if necessary.
- c) Deny it. This is the least recommended option; however, it helps in recognizing that it exists and could be happening inside organizations or collectives.
- d) Face it. That is, react to the situation. Resignify, affirming the honorable moments or those of political work. From the psychosocial approach, the option of facing the risk is what we aim to strengthen by working with political subjects.

- The risk assessment that can be carried out is not absolute. That is, we cannot reach an exact analysis of the situation; we get close to it. Remember that the risk also changes—in part because work has been done on the related vulnerabilities and capacities but also due to the movement of the other actors or the context. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously analyze and evaluate it.
- There is a widespread concern that persists among defenders that the risk can be measured but what can actually be done is to understand it and try to interpret it. The risk level is not decided based on a number but rather on qualitative analysis that considers various factors, as we have reviewed (context, actors, incidents, threats). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize this, of course, in addition to the work on their existing vulnerabilities, capacities, and coping mechanisms. Accordingly, the aim is not to eliminate subjectivity but rather to create a dialogue between all of these elements in order to develop a shared vision.
- Risk is directly related to our work; as previously mentioned, there are people who do not perceive what we do in a positive light and who seek out situations that could be an opportunity to attack us. Analyzing the risk offers us the possibility of avoiding these situations (even when the perpetrator may have the capacity to carry it out) and of taking action in the interest of having a reasonably protected space, that is, of taking measures based on the reality and on what is needed.
- There are not positive or negative reactions to border-line situations or those based on aggression—there are only the ways we manage to respond at the time. Recognizing this lets us understand how the situations of risk faced by political subjects have repercussions on their work—considering the different fields and levels that we have seen in the exercises—even when, at first, it is not possible to see all the impacts clearly. It also makes it possible to give new meaning to the way they have managed to respond to these border-line situations and cope with them.
- Consider, then, that sociopolitical violence upsets the balance of welfare among people and groups, affecting their psycho-emotional well-being, the group's operations, the bonds they form with each other, and the way they set forth their objectives or work strategies.
- The impacts of sociopolitical violence vary and show up differently in each individual depending on the event itself, each person's conditions and circumstances, and on all the kinds of resources that are available for facing the situation.

Topic 4. Fear analysis, a contribution to the psychosocial approach

When carrying out the risk analysis from the psychosocial approach, as we saw earlier, it is necessary to analyze the psychosocial impacts produced by the ongoing exposure to the risk.

As part of this material, we have shared some keys that allow us to think about security as a way of facing the impacts that are produced by the risks that political subjects are exposed to as a result of their work. As previously mentioned in the sections above, working in human rights defense and in contexts of sociopolitical violence involves a risk, and it also affects us in different dimensions (corporal, emotional, thoughts and beliefs, activities, and actions) and on different levels (personal, family, organizational, community, and social). These are some examples:

- It affects relationships as a result of distrust.
- It paralyzes actions that are based on organizing and solidarity.
- It changes daily routines.
- It leaves behind a sensation of vulnerability and a lack of protection.
- It affects physical and emotional health.
- It normalizes violence.



It should be stressed that these impacts are normal in an abnormal situation. As Martín Baró said, the abnormal is the violence that is faced, and the negative effects that we have and the different ways of coping with them are normal. One of the most common emotions in situations of risk is **fear**, which has the function of alert—like a security mechanism that enables us to prevent situations of risk. What is complex about this feeling is that it can lead the person or organizations to states of paralysis, obsession, or even guilt.

Fear refers to experiences unleashed by the perception of danger, whether certain or imprecise, current or probable in the future, which comes from the subject's inner world or surrounding world. The objectification of danger can lead the subject to shape it as a risk of vital threat. The certainty or high probability that this threat will happen transforms insecurity into fear. The perception of the threat being imminent can transform fear into terror or panic. Panic occurs when a dangerous event causes a spontaneous and disorganized reaction in the individual or in the community.¹⁰

¹⁰In E. Lira and M.I. Castillo (1991). Psychology of Political Threat and Fear. Chile: Instituto Latinoamericano de Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos (ILAS), p. 61. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3F1MV1x>.

In this case, speaking of fear from the psychosocial approach as a mechanism of sociopolitical violence can open the possibility of approaching it in another way, taking it outside of the individual and giving it new meanings based on a political interpretation rather on the individual way we understand and experience it. In this regard, we identify a close relationship between **risk**, harm, and **fear**. As previously mentioned, fear is an emotion, a natural reaction to a threat or risk; however, in contexts of sociopolitical violence, it also becomes a strategy of social control that has a deliberate impact caused by groups that exercise power to safeguard their interests; that is, fear is not only a means but also an end.

Analyzing it in this way makes it possible to give political meaning to the emotions that are used to generate paralysis and control, which enables the activation of emotional, security-related, political, behavioral, and relational tools to react in a transformative way and face the risk.

In this context, fear is simultaneously formed within fear and is ultimately a necessary condition and result obtained from political repression. Ongoing vital threat, the absence of stable personal, group, institutional, and social parameters, the growing dissolution of the boundaries between security and danger, between the prohibited and the permitted, and between the real and the possible and the difficulty of putting the sensations of threat or persecution to a reality test cause a widespread experience of terror and uncertainty.¹¹

We can identify at least two types of fear: fear of the known—that is, of a concrete threat—and of the unknown—that is, that which produces uncertainty from lacking a good understanding of what it is. In contexts of sociopolitical violence, both mix together, as, on the one hand, arbitrariness and disinformation enable fear to spread throughout the “unknown,” and, on the other hand, the ongoing experience of repression exposes people to more concrete and precise fears that are also more likely to transpire.¹²

11Ibacache, J. Meléndez, L. Castaldi, M. Cabrera, and H. Vega (1996). Las huellas del miedo. La represión política: daño y reparación. En *Persona, estado y poder: Estudios sobre salud mental* [Traces of Fear. Political repression: harm and redress] Volume II, Chile 1990-1995, ed. Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU). Santiago Chile: Ediciones LOM, 1996, pp. 29-39.

12Clemencia Correa and Alda Facio (2018). As Women HDRs, how do we face fear in the current context? Virtual Feminist Dialogue. Mexico: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial A.C. Jass Mesoamérica. Available at: <https://bit.ly/328sQbc>

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

- It is important to understand that fear is one of the impacts that arises in situations of risk.

Fear	
Characteristics	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sensation of vulnerability- State of alert- Individual and collective powerlessness- Disturbance of the sense of reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recognition of the risk- Corporal reactions- Fantasies- Increased feelings of dread- Behavioral modifications

- Being familiar with the content and the actors along with their interests and strategies makes it possible to understand the intent behind their actions and then be able to face the impacts of these acts consciously.
- Assessing the risk and developing preventative and protective measures allows for having security conditions and coping with impacts; one that is very important to analyze is fear.
- Doing work with reflection and collective agreements makes it possible to reclaim control.
- Facing the fear, talking about it, taking it apart, analyzing it, and situating it as part of the risk and vice versa will be a collective challenge that will strengthen them.

KEYS FOR WORKING ON FEAR

- Demystify fear as being something that is essentially negative; that is, identify the function that fear has in social life to be able to recognize it.
- Identify and recognize it by naming it and specifying what comprises it.
- Share the fear/socialize it: depersonalizing the experiences of the group and its members enables identification and mirroring.
- Analyze it alongside the risk. What is the probability that it will take place? Does the fear match the risk?
- Undertaking preventative and reactive actions based on the components of the fear.
- Carry out the cycle again, considering that situations change.



Topic 5. Protection plan and protocols

As we've seen up until this point, the security strategy has numerous elements that are committed to a comprehensive way of addressing the risks that political subjects are exposed to. One of those elements is a protection plan, which includes a series of concrete and systematic actions that allow for preventing, mitigating, and acting in the face of risks. That is, it includes everything that each organization considers necessary in order to be protected, in terms of both prevention and emergency. Ideally, this plan should be developed collectively after carrying out a risk assessment inside the organization.

These security measures, protocols, and plans aim to reduce risks in situations of violence or repressive acts while also reaching a level of control over fear and distress. Prevention deals with early measures that should be implemented in order to persuade, dissuade, and avoid danger, to decrease risk and/or its impacts. Protection deals with the type of measures that are carried out to safeguard life, physical and psychological integrity, freedom, and the creation of working conditions for human rights defense. The latter refers more to the concrete application of measures and to the reaction to an imminent threat.

If the risk assessment is done in an emergency situation, a protection fast track should be created, including the needs that the person/people at risk express, reintroducing all the results from the analysis. On occasion, it is necessary to pause this work in order to provide care during a crisis if the impacts have been overly intense. Moreover, if there are other organizations involved, their participation in the assessment is considered advisable, or the agreed upon security measures should be shared with them—as long as there is consent from the accompanied individuals—in order to assist them in assuming responsibilities as a collective and having improved coordination.

An indispensable element in developing protection plans is to include security routines in the activities of the organization, collective, or community in order to make the issue part of their daily tasks. These are some ways of doing it, reviewing what we have seen up until this point:

- Periodically conduct an analysis of the context.
- Record, analyze, and react to security incidents.
- Assign specific responsibilities to different team members in order to follow up on the protection plan.
- Assign resources (both human and financial) to the issue of security as part of the activity planning of each organization, collective, or community.

Don't forget that the protection plan is only one part of the security strategy, which is why it responds to what the organization has identified as a risk and the psychosocial impacts it has caused for them as well as their needs and the situations they are going through. This plan includes:

- a) Permanent policies that are incorporated into organizations' daily activities (for example, mental health policies, staff care, information handling, among others).
- b) An emergency action framework that includes the minimum response requirements in the case of an emergency.
- c) Protocols for specific situations in the work of each organization, collective, or community (for example, a protocol for traveling to a new area, for carrying out mobilizations, and for hearings, among others).

Remember, in the sections above, we shared elements for creating a security strategy from a psychosocial perspective, and likewise, in Appendix 1, some components are presented for carrying out an evaluation of the security measures; both can contribute to the creation of new measures, plans, and protocols according to the needs of each person, organization, or collective, as the case may be and considering that not all measures can be applied to every reality.

Exercise 9.

PROTECTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE: To reach an agreement about the protection measures that are needed in daily life and in emergencies.



2 hr 30 min

MATERIALS:

flipcharts,
markers,
masking tape

In the previous exercise, vulnerabilities were identified, among other things. Now these vulnerabilities, which correspond to a certain threat, should be turned into capacities. This exercise can be done in a plenary session or in groups depending on the number of participants. Each vulnerability of each threat will be worked on. Ask: What would have to be done to turn this vulnerability into a capacity.

After this question has been answered, the facilitator asks what they could do immediately and what they could position for the medium and long term. Putting this in a chart could start to provide a structure for the proposals.

According to the threat:

Vulnerability | Measure(s) | Time | Person Responsible | Resources

By using this chart, a more precise order can be established. For example, select which measures apply to daily activities from the beginning to the end of their day (security policies); what measures do they choose to put into effect at very specific moments, for example, a trip, a hearing, a press conference, a report presentation, some other activity that they do not do on an ongoing basis and that could put them in danger (protocols). All of this can be included in a document, which should be periodically reviewed, changed, or supplemented.

Next comes working in times of emergency. Ask them to make a sequential communication chain to clearly define if something would happen to the person they are calling and what that person would do or have to power to activate.

It's useful to think about different levels of the communication chain; the first is the organization's internal staff, the second is to local support networks, the third to national and international support networks, including any authorities that could possibly be called. It is necessary to have a directory with names, numbers, and e-mail addresses. Different scenarios can be considered: a raid, arrest, forced disappearance, attack, or sexual assault, among others.

CLOSING REFLECTION FOR THE PROTECTION PLAN

- The protection plan is not for the facilitator(s); the “whats” and “hows” are decisions made by the person/people at risk. No measure is better or worse, but some are more fitting for each situation of risk. These decisions are made in accordance with each organization or collective’s conditions, time, place, and ways of doing things. It helps to recognize other experiences, but it is better to consider ideas that might even seem a bit “ridiculous” and to try to reach a consensus.
- Developing a security plan does not happen automatically. Numerous proposals are made, and they should be given more content and clarity, especially in the area of responsibilities. Consider that having a higher number of measures is not always better; that is, having many measures is not helpful if they are not followed. It is better to have few but to actually follow through with them. Look for starting points in order to make gradual progress and go from having a protection plan to strategizing security (incorporating the issue into the entire structure and into all the strategies of the organization or movement).
- The measures that are taken should not only be considered for the workplace, but they should also be applied to homes, commutes, and territories. On occasion, it is necessary to do advocacy work with authorities in order to put a stop to more serious acts of aggression or to demand that they act on those that have already occurred; in both cases, it’s a matter of demanding they take responsibility.

IN SUMMARY:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSESSING RISK FROM THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH

- Understanding how sociopolitical violence operates makes it possible to signify the risk as a result of a repression strategy that is being carried out against the political subjects; that is, it has an intent. When people gain a certain awareness of this, it enables them to politicize their vision of security.
- The fact that it is a collective reflection and construction contributes to fostering a culture of security that permeates the organization's strategy, becoming part of its daily activities and not only of their reaction to emergencies.
- The commitment is to create a shared perspective on risk, security, and sociopolitical violence without denying each member's perception. Otherwise, tension, polarization, and conflicts could grow among the staff.
- Analyzing the risk makes it possible to aim for the collective construction of a more autonomous vision of security that would be compatible with each organization's political project, differentiating it from the traditional concept of police and military security.
- While risk assessment is a tool that is part of the security strategy, it also provides the opportunity to gain an overall vision of the situation that the collective or organization is currently experiencing. This makes it possible to identify the psychosocial impacts and what would need to be strengthened.
- From this perspective, risk assessment is a tool that allows for reducing the costs of sociopolitical violence.
- It is important to see risk and fear as two elements that interact but that do not necessarily correspond to one another. That is, people can feel very afraid when the risk level is not that high; or, they may have be facing a very high risk and not feel intense fear. Working on risks helps them feel that they are taking actions to cope with the fear. To address this issue, it is necessary to take care in ensuring that there are conditions of individual and collective stability.
- It should be considered that when opening the issue of risk, a variety of impacts will inevitably surface (emotions, conflicts, questions about the way of working, differences in the perception of what is being analyzed or what should be done about it, among others). What is always important in the assessment space is to encourage listening, validation, and the need to address a matter at another time. This can be part of the course of action or the measures of the strategy that will be developed.

GLOSSARY

Capacity. Strengths and resources that a group or individual has for gaining acceptable and/or reasonable security conditions.

Coping mechanisms. These are the responses or reactions that people or groups have to sociopolitical violence in order to care for life, integrity, and dignity. They are cognitive, emotional, political, and cultural tools that change and adapt in accordance with the events or border-line situations that we go through as well as the context we find ourselves in. Therefore, they can change meaning and not be so positive when they become rigid responses or are prolonged for too much time. From the psychosocial approach, we understand them to be whatever sociopolitical violence was not able to strip us of. Recognizing them makes it possible for us to see beyond the harm that was done and also evaluate what remains, what has not been harmed, and how we were able to respond. Often, coping mechanisms are harder to identify because they are seen through judgements of disqualification, hence the importance of resignifying these responses and becoming aware of them, which allows us to make better use of them and even share them. Like psychosocial impacts, they show up within different fields (psycho-emotional, security, internal dynamics, and political project), levels (individual, family, organizational, community, and social), and dimensions (corporal, emotional, thoughts, beliefs, activities, and actions).

Fear. The psychosocial approach contributes an integral vision of the experience of fear in contexts of violence: We assume that fear is an emotion, a natural reaction to a threat or a situation of risk. However, when facing a context of sociopolitical violence in which there are certain actors who take actions to maintain or impose their own interests, the psychosocial approach offers a more detailed interpretation of fear: While it is still an emotion, it also becomes a social control strategy that is carried out by groups of power with an intentional impact. Framing fear from this perspective makes it possible to give it political meaning. We can say this action is a way of “politicizing fear,” that is, of giving political meaning to the emotions that are used to produce paralysis and control. One of the main contributions of accompaniment is the politization of experiences that result from sociopolitical violence, which gives access to additional tools for facing it and developing coping mechanisms.¹³

Fields of psychosocial work. These are aspects of political subjects’ lives that, according to our experience, are affected by sociopolitical violence:

Internal dynamics. This refers to the analysis and approach to everything that the relationships within a collective or organization affect and construct, such as institutional policies, roles, functions, attitudes, structures, or ways of behaving, communicating, and coordinating,

¹³ Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial A.C. (2019), *El enfoque psicosocial: Un aporte para el trabajo de acompañamiento en contextos de violencia* [The Psychosocial Approach: A contribution to accompaniment work in contexts of violence]. Unpublished.

the facilitation of processes for resolving conflicts in a positive manner and for redesigning an organizational structure, among others.

Political project. This refers to the ethical-political conceptions and orientations that guide the actions of an organization or people within a collective. When facing border-line situations due to sociopolitical violence, it's common for the political project to also be questioned, whether due to dilemmas or to changes that arise when facing the situations of violence. Often, the traumatic events produce ruptures inside of groups, not only of the bonds but also of the reference points that have been constructed, for example, the organization's political commitment or beliefs.

Psycho-emotional. This refers to emotions and feelings that are experienced in the process of coping with a border-line situation. Together with the accompanied individuals or group, the process of recognizing the impacts is carried out, seeking to strengthen the coping mechanisms that they have from their own experience. It is extremely important to create ways for the accompanied people to understand that, in a context of violence, the emotions they experience are exacerbated and, at the same time, manipulated as part of the terror strategy.

Security. This is the set of preventive and reactive measures that individuals, collectives, and organization alliance networks take (based on the different

risk levels they have as a result of exercising human rights) in order to reduce the impact of risks that result from situations of sociopolitical violence.

Impunity. While in general it can be understood as the absence of punishment for those who are responsible for a crime and/or human rights violation, at Aluna, we take an interest in stressing how the State systematically omits to fulfill its obligation of investigating, trying, and sentencing those who commit serious human rights violations, provided that tolerating these events allows the structure that supports acts of sociopolitical and patriarchal violence to be maintained and reproduced. Therefore, it is made evident in the absence of punishment but also in the systematic tolerance of injustice, the denial of acts committed by the State, and even in the manipulation of legal and legislative instruments which perpetrates and legitimizes state violence, in such a way that it is a fundamental part of the repression strategy.¹⁴

Intersectionality. This is an analytical category that comes from black feminisms from the 1960s and 70s, which sets forth a theoretical-methodological perspective that refers to how different forms of oppression (stemming not only from the condition of gender but also from race, social class, ethnicity, and age, among others) converge in a particular situation. It creates visibility around how complexity grows among different power relations when they are superimposed or connected, emphasizing the

¹⁴ To see this in further depth, see C. Correa, "La impunidad y sus efectos en la sociedad" [Impunity and Its Effects on Society], in *Revista Revuelta* 15, year 7, Sept.–Nov. 2009. Available at: <https://www.alunapicosocial.org/single-post/2017/05/18/La-impunidad-y-sus-efectos-en-la-sociedad>

political dimension of these intersections and questioning the universalism that is often posed by social movements, academia, or human rights defense. It also sets forth an in-depth questioning of what it means to be a woman in different contexts, beyond the universality imposed by white feminism, understanding that there are many ways to be a woman and that, in many cases, gender is not the only category of fundamental oppression, just as class or ethnic identity are not the only categories either.

Political repression. We understand this to be a violent act or a set of violent acts exercised from a position of power against citizens in order to control or punish opposing political and/or social activities.

- They are intentional acts carried out by the State.
- They involve the State's direct responsibility or support from the State.
- They are systematic acts carried out under a comprehensive strategy.
- They aim to cause psychosocial impacts on the population.
- Acts of repression have various meanings, including control and normalizing the State's abuses of power.
- It is understood as a military objective, not only the armed action but also all the dimensions of the meaning of life, including cultural, ethical, psychological, and social meaning.

Political subjects. Individuals or organized groups that become aware of their reality and get involved in denouncing it and transforming it through processes of questioning,

truth-seeking, and justice, and by developing options and projects for liberation from models of oppression. These political subjects do work on economic, political, social, and cultural disputes that affect the specific territories where they live and that, in many cases, are represented by corporal territory, the biophysical territory where they live, the spiritual or the cosmogonic, as the case is with indigenous communities. The difficulties they face are evident in the violations of different rights or situations of injustice such as violence against the freedom of expression, the growing rates of feminicides and gender-based violence, the forced displacement of populations, forced disappearance of persons, systematic torture, the criminalization of social protest, militarization and paramilitarization in territories, and libel and hate campaigns, among many others. Political subjects are victims of structural violence, and they are also the main targets of sociopolitical violence.

Psychosocial approach. This is a way of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the personal, collective, and social harm that becomes evident in contexts of sociopolitical violence and, consequently, defines objectives and methods for treating this harm by using psycho-emotional, security, and political tools. When we talk about the psychosocial approach, we refer to the perspective from which we do the accompaniment work; this is about recognizing where we are thinking from, the lens that allows us to see the reality of the violence, the impacts, and the coping processes of the affected individuals and groups. The approach is to state the place where we have situated ourselves in order to act.

Psychosocial impacts. This refers to the set of tensions, losses, changes, or harm caused in the lives of political subjects by sociopolitical violence. Faced by individuals or groups, they are the product of abrupt changes that border-line situations produce, and, to some extent, they depend on the work they do, the contexts they find themselves in, and their personal and collective background. According to Aluna's experience, they are the negative effects that show up in different fields (psycho-emotional, security, internal dynamics, and political project), on different levels (individual, family, organizational, community, and social), and dimensions (corporal, emotional, thoughts, beliefs, activities, and actions).

Risk. This is a possibility of harm associated with human rights defense work and/or the context. Assessing risk tends to be objective, and it is necessary to address psycho-emotional conditions to be able to develop objective security strategies in parallel.

Risk assessment. This is a process that consists of analyzing components of security. It is used as a basis for defining the security strategy and measures and adapting them to the individual, organization, collective, or network. The diagnosis is not static. Because it depends on the circumstances, it changes over time, and should therefore be reevaluated periodically. Ideally, it should involve everyone in the organization (modified PBI Facilitation Guide).

Security incidents. Any act or event that could affect our personal security or that of our organization.

Sociopolitical violence. This is an expression of power that States exercise over the population to keep them under control, inhibit social discontent, and dissolve struggles of resistance to capitalist economic policies of dispossession, repression, exploitation, and exclusion. It includes the violence that the State exercises directly when it exceeds the legitimate use of force (State violence), but it is also the violence exercised by non-State actors (armed paramilitary groups, organized crime, private security groups, white/civil guards, etc.) whose aim is to control the population in order to protect or impose political, economic, and ideological interests.

While it is important to recognize that there are other actors that exercise sociopolitical violence (not only the State) the nature of these actors implies different responsibilities. When the State exercises violence (through institutions and corporations), it commits serious human rights violations against the population by its own actions, but when it is exercised by private actors, they commit crimes. (The responsibility is not the same; it exists in both cases, but to varying degrees.) However, the State violates human rights by omission when it does not punish the guilty parties, when it allows them to carry out the acts of violence, or when it acts in acquiescence/complicity with other actors, such as private companies or public-sector groups.

Threat. An event, a targeted message, a warning that represents the possibility that someone may harm the physical, psycho-emotional, political integrity of another person, of their loved ones, or of their property through an intentional act, which is often violent.

Vulnerabilities. These are the internal weaknesses of defenders and their organizations. The condition of vulnerability is also tied to economic/financial and psycho-emotional situations. For example: a vulnerability is not having a cell phone, but if you do not have the adequate financial conditions, you cannot have a cell phone.



APPENDIX

Security components	Information for the evaluation	Vulnerability or capacity? Why?
Organizational structure	Organized or structured group? Who makes decisions and how are they made? What about taking/assigning responsibilities?	
Offices and houses	Physical characteristics: Do you have security bars on windows and doors, an alarm, camera, etc.? Is there somewhere to hide / an evacuation route? Relationship with neighbors: Is there an alert system among neighbors?	
Mobility	What means of transportation do you have? Assessment of what kind of transportation is safer (public or private) depending on the situation. Do you have travel protocols? Do you have a monitoring system?	
Context / Area	Do you have a good understanding of the work areas and the situation of risk? Carrying out the analysis: Do you have reference contacts in these areas? Is there somewhere to hide / an evacuation route? Access to the area.	
Information	Do you have different reliable sources? How do you handle sensitive information and where do you keep it?	
Digital security	Do you work with digital security programs? (For example, for encrypting: Truecrypt / PGP / etc.)? Do you have secure e-mail accounts? Managing social media (Facebook / twitter / etc.)	

Security components	Information for the evaluation	Vulnerability or capacity? Why?
Communication	What do you communicate via cell phone? Do you have a policy on keeping cell phones out of meetings? Have your phones ever been tapped? Do you have telecommunication systems? Do they work properly? Charged batteries, etc.? Is there an alternate or emergency communication system?	
Support network	Do you have regional, national, and international relationships and contacts (organizations, institutions, delegations, embassies, community leaders, religious leaders, or other influential actors?	
Political advocacy and awareness raising (own resources or support network)	Do you have dialogues with authorities on different levels? Do you issue communiqués, urgent actions, etc.? Do you have access to the media (national or international / independent), and do you know how to manage relationships with them? Do you have the capacity to create calls to action / to mobilize people to carry out public activities, etc.?	
Legal access (own resources or support network)	Do you have a lawyer / legal representation / physical presence at trials or meetings that also respond in emergency situations?	
Human and financial resources	Do you have enough resources to do your work?	
Psycho-emotional components (individual / collective)	Do you have a mental health policy? Do you have external support? (psychological support, supervision, etc.)	
Emergency	Minimums: - Communication chain - Person/people who are assigned responsibility for internal matters - Alert network - Emergency fund	

