

# tool 32 Information Gathering

## Factsheet

The gathering of complete, reliable and timely information on grave violations to produce compelling reports and inform political and programmatic response is central to the MRM's purpose. NGOs are most often not direct witnesses of violations and access to information may represent a significant challenge. Accordingly, the gathering of information requires thorough inquiries with a wide variety of sources capable of producing strong testimonies and evidence. The reliability of the information needs to be assessed to preserve the credibility of the mechanism and its ability to mobilize stronger response.

### Developing a network of contacts:

NGOs most often are not direct witnesses of violations and therefore need to proactively seek access to information that can be sensitive, and likely not very public in nature. In many cases, only a few individuals may be aware or knowledgeable about violations, and information gathering may require privileged access to these "gatekeepers". NGOs should therefore strategically develop their network of contacts. Such a strategy may include the development of community-based child protection networks which can raise an alert when a violation is taking place and facilitate a response. Network building is also an imperative step towards building greater capacity to facilitate a response to the abuses documented as part of the monitoring exercise.

### Sources:

It is common to distinguish between primary and secondary sources to differentiate the relative weight that should be attributed to the information collected.

- **Primary sources:** persons who were present during the incident (victim, eyewitness or perpetrator).
- **Secondary sources:** persons who are close to the victim or were in contact with the victim before or after the incident (parents/guardians, teachers, community members, community or religious leaders, medical personnel, journalists, NGO personnel, activists/human rights defenders, lawyers, prosecutors, police, etc.), or documents and other material

evidence that can confirm that the incident took place and provide additional details (photographs of victim's wounds or scars, medical records, police records, reports from other investigative entities, photographs of the site where the incident took place showing signs of violence, ammunition left behind, etc.).

### Collecting information:

Claims regarding grave violations must be corroborated by facts gathered on the ground. In this sense, the most common and effective way of collecting information about grave violations is through interviewing victims and witnesses. Interviewing is also potentially the most sensitive approach to data collection and should be treated with extreme caution to prevent possible risks for the interviewee, the monitor and the broader community. Possible risks include threats, retaliation, exclusion, stigmatization of the victim and re-traumatization. Other approaches to information gathering may include site visits, review of media coverage and collation of documents including NGO reports, laws, policies and programmatic framework. While the MRM primarily seeks to find key information on specific cases of violations, particular efforts should still be invested in documenting the broader context in which violations are taking place. Whoever is collecting the information has the responsibility to gather, store and share information in a way that ensures confidentiality and protects the rights and privacy of respondents.

## Assessing the reliability of sources:

NGOs may use various techniques to corroborate the information obtained from victims and witnesses. An interviewer can test the internal consistency and coherence of testimony by returning to the same subject several times but with different questions. In general, confirming key information with different sources -- "triangulating" -- is an effective way to measure reliability. Primary sources are usually given greater weight and may be considered more reliable than secondary sources due to their degree of proximity to the violation. Similarly, the reliability of secondary sources may be assessed as a function of remoteness. For example, a parent should be given more weight than a community leader who heard from that parent. Independently of distance to the claim, an assessment of how reliable a source may be should factor in the possible bias of a witness by taking into consideration ideological and political beliefs which may translate into some truth being exaggerated or silenced.







## Verification of information:

The UN is ultimately responsible and accountable for the reliability of the information reported to the Security Council. Accordingly, the chair of the CTFMR must be satisfied that the inputs provided by partners reach a minimum standard of verification. According to the MRM Field Manual, information gathered from only one primary source deemed credible by a trained and reliable monitor should be verified by a designated member of the CTFMR before it is reported to the Security Council. When the CTFMR has information that has been assessed as credible, but for which complete verification has not been possible, it should still be documented and may be reported as "alleged" or "subject to verification".

## Follow-up actions:

Gathering information should not be considered independently from the response to grave violations. While monitors are often not in a position to directly offer assistance to victims and community members, they should still take responsibility for facilitating access to referral services by providing key information on which services are available and how to gain access. If services are not accessible or not used by potential beneficiaries, gaps and obstacles should be documented so actions are taken to strengthen the referral system.

## related tools

-  [tool 33](#) – Checklist 'Interviewing techniques'
-  [tool 31](#) – Factsheet 'What information is needed for the MRM?'
-  [tool 34](#) – Annotated case study 'Recognizing the grave violations'
-  [tool 37](#) – Case study 'Monitoring grave violations through child protection networks in the Gaza Strip'
-  [tool 39](#) – Case study 'Village child protection committees in Eastern DRC'
-  [tool 41](#) – Group exercise 'Security while collecting information'