

Civilian Harm Mitigation

A primer

Civilian harm consists of all negative effects on civilian personal or community well-being caused by use of force in hostilities. Effects can occur directly (death, physical or mental trauma, property damage) or indirectly through the destruction of critical infrastructure, disruption of access to basic needs and services, or the loss of livelihood.ⁱ

Civilian Harm Mitigation (CHM)ⁱⁱ refers to efforts by armed groups, militaries, and nations to prevent, reduce, and address the harm resulting from military operations. It involves identifying and minimizing risks to civilians to the greatest extent possible. CHM goes beyond legal compliance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Why CHM matters

CHM is a legal, moral, and military-strategic imperative that improves operational outcomes by increasing a force's legitimacy and its ability to protect civilians, while also creating an environment in which civilians are protected from the effects of war to the greatest extent possible.

When and how to apply CHM

CHM must be conducted during all phases of warfare and consists of three major reinforcing activities^{iv}:

1. Tracking: quantifying civilian harm

The process of determining the level of civilian harm resulting from military operations. Tracking is ideally conducted by a dedicated tracking cell working across the staff directorates, involving at least intelligence, operations and planning staff. It requires a systematic process of data collection, using internal and external data, retaining the data in a usable format, and feeding that data to an analytical team.

2. Analysis: evaluating civilian harm

The internal process whereby an analytical team analyzes the data on civilian harm for the purpose of operational learning. It includes identifying problematic trends, formulating appropriate mitigation strategies, and proposing specific implementation strategies to staff directorates.

3. Implementation: mitigating and responding to civilian harm

The process whereby the military implements the mitigation strategies proposed by the analytical team. Mitigation strategies can be applied across military functions and domains and can involve changes in training objectives, doctrine, material capabilities, reporting requirements, and tasking. The data gathered in steps 2 and 3 should further lead to meaningful and appropriate responses to those civilians harmed by military operations, for instance in the form of direct acknowledgement, an apology, *ex gratia* payments or other forms of assistance.

PAX conducts research, advocacy, and training for security actors on CHM. For more practical information regarding CHM, what we do, or how we may help you, reach out to:

- Marc Garlasco, Military Advisor, at garlasco@paxforpeace.nl, or
- Erin Bijl, Senior Project Officer, at bijl@paxforpeace.nl.

ⁱ Erin Bijl, Welmoet Wels and Wilbert van der Zeijden, eds., *On Civilian Harm: Examining the Complex Negative Effects of Violent Conflict on Civilians* (Utrecht, PAX: 2021), 33.

ⁱⁱ PAX uses CHM as opposed to the US military's addition of 'response' to create CHMR. PAX considers meaningful post-harm response to be a necessary part of appropriate mitigation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Our understanding of CHM draws heavily on Larry Lewis, "Organizing for Civilian Harm Mitigation: Best Practices for Military Implementation of CHM," Paper (2022), 1.

^{iv} Lewis, "Organizing for Civilian Harm Mitigation," 2-4.

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PAX and the Protection of Civilians Program

Worldwide, PAX works to build just and peaceful societies across the globe. PAX brings together people who have the courage to stand for peace. The PAX Protection of Civilians (PoC) program seeks to increase the effectiveness of PoC interventions by enabling civilians to hold local and international security actors to account, and by enabling and motivating security actors to design and implement protection strategies that are civilian-centered.

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