# USHA

**Universities
Safety and Health
Association**

# Travel Risk Toolkit

# Travel Risk Profiling Guidance

In partnership with

# Contents

# About the Toolkit

Managing the risks associated with international travel has become a growing concern for universities. Recent years have seen challenges in the form of travel disruption, instability and natural hazards and increasing security risks.

Awareness of incidents and growing expectations with respect to duty of care mean it is important to have a robust travel risk management programme in place which supports their institution's unique travel risk profile.

ISO31030:2021 sets out an effective framework for travel risk management in any sector. But implementing this within a Higher Education Institution can be challenging due to:

- the shared ownership of aspects of travel risk across different functions,

- the wide range of traveller profiles and reasons for travelling,

- the challenges of academic freedom and institutional culture, and

- the need to comply with public sector procurement requirements.

To support members to implement travel risk management within their institutions, USHA is developing operational guidance in the form of a toolkit.

This will enable sharing our learning about practical implementation tools, key principles and HE specific considerations to help members effectively implement the framework in their institution, in a manner which will be effective for them.

The tool kit is intended to support professionals within Higher Education who are developing travel risk processes within their HEI. The concepts they contain should be adapted as required to suit each HEI.

The first element of the toolkit is a trip risk calculator which has been developed to help institutions and travellers understand the risk profile of their planned travel. It is not a risk assessment, rather it gives illustrations of trip characteristics at risk levels ranging from negligible risk to extreme. This tool can be used to inform travel decision making processes to identify high risk trips and as a tool for communicating with staff and students about travel risk.

Further content in development includes tools to support travel risk assessment, travel approval, contingency planning and risk exposure and appetite tools. USHA is grateful to Peregrine Risk Management who reviewed this document.

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# Travel Risk Factors

The risks involved in any travel are influenced by many factors which interact to escalate or reduce risks. The location risk profile is the starting point for considering the risk of a particular trip, but the detail of who is travelling, exactly where they are going, when and for what reason will considerably vary the risk. This diagram and supporting table provide an overview of these factors and how they interact to generate a unique risk profile for a particular journey.

## PEOPLE:
Personal Characteristics, Experience, Health, Support Networks, Language

## PLACE:
Unrest & Conflict, Terrorism, Crime, Climate, Weather, Endemic Diseases, Natural Disasters, Political Stability, Infrastructure

Authorities Law & Cultural Norms

**TRAVEL RISK**

Elections, Acceptance of Researchers

Terrain, Remoteness, Neighbourhoods, Bio/Chem Hazards

## PURPOSE:
Method & Timing of Transportation, Activities, Sensitivity of Purpose (e.g., research subject)

## People

The personal characteristics of travellers can make them more/less vulnerable to targeted threats than the local population.

Cultural and legal differences in some regions can mean travellers' personal characteristics (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/nationality, religion, appearance) may mean that they are at increased risk from targeted threats (such as imprisonment and violence) and added mitigations may be required. An individual's high public profile/social media presence can also affect the risk.

Pre-existing mental or physical health conditions could be a concern if the healthcare support available is not sufficient or could be exacerbated by the trip activities. Adjustments may be needed if the traveller has a mental or physical disability/condition which needs to be taken account of when planning the trip.

Travellers' appearance and behaviour can increase/decrease their risk from targeted crimes. People with a high level of familiarity with a location are often (but not always) at reduced risk. People returning to their home country (or former place of residence) have knowledge of local norms, and support networks but also may be vulnerable to different targeted threats to international travellers.

Traveller/trip leader levels of competency and experience will increase/decrease their ability to undertake the trip and associated activities safely. This includes the training they have completed, previous experience of this type of travel and their familiarity with the destination country. While familiarity is beneficial, travellers returning to their own country can be at risk, as the purpose/activities they are undertaking can expose them to different or increased threats.

The support available to travellers, if needed, is a key mitigator. This could include partners in the destination (e.g., NGOs, local HEI collaborators, facilitation from agencies like the British Council or use of professional security and local guides). For high and extreme risk travel, the presence of family and friends in country may not be sufficient support.

## People/Purpose

The acceptance and support from the local community can be a powerful mitigator of risks.

Local actors/community groups can control threats on the traveller's behalf by having formal or informal consent and acceptance for their presence and activities, supplying practical support, information on threats and early warning of problems. However, the reverse can apply if there is resentment or hostility to the subject/purpose of the trip, the organisations involved or western Higher Education.

Researchers must ensure they understand the context and the motivations of relevant actors at the destination as part of their planning and the profile of the HEI (and any local partners), the traveller and the purpose of the travel should be considered against the interests and motivations of local actors (government agencies, militias, community groups etc.).

## Purpose

The reason for the travel will affect its timing and places being visited. Travel, particularly for research, can require extensive travel within a country which can be a significant risk particularly if travelling at night, in regions with poor transport infrastructure or via incident prone routes. The condition and appropriateness of the vehicle and competence of the driver should be considered. As incidents are more likely during in-country travel it is an important consideration.

The timing of a trip can influence risk; elections, religious festivals and seasonal severe weather can elevate the risk of natural disasters, civil unrest, and/or conflict.

Activities to achieve research outcomes can be hazardous (e.g., environmental sampling, use of machinery, chemicals & biohazards etc.) particularly if lone working. These will require risk assessment, usually carried out separately as part of the relevant activity risk assessment process to avoid overcomplicating the assessment of the travel risk.

If the reason for the travel (e.g., research topic) is sensitive or controversial and may not have acceptance from local actors, the risk of hostility, violence or detention could increase. In some locations there may be requirements for government consent to conduct research.

## Purpose/ Place

The purpose of the travel may require visiting more hazardous localities within a country that most travellers would not be exposed to. This includes visiting areas such as

- deprived neighbourhoods like favelas and refugee camps which can have high crime and communicable disease threats,
- hazardous terrain such as minefields, deserts, jungles, polluted areas etc.,
- conflict areas and borders with conflict areas,
- and remote places where support and infrastructure are limited.

The risks of travel to these localities can be high risk even if the country is rated moderate or low.

## Place

The risk level of the destination can be considered as security threats (crime, terrorism, unrest, conflict, cyber and sanctions) and environmental factors (health, weather and natural disasters, legal/cultural differences, infrastructure). Infrastructure covers the safety, reliability and availability of telecommunications, transport, power, water, healthcare provision, emergency, and security services.

Travel risk advisory services provide risk ratings for destinations (usually rated on a 1-5 scale from low/negligible to severe/extreme). These are often provided by insurers as part of their travel insurance policy provision, however decision making by insurers is more strongly dictated by FCDO advice so both should be referenced in processes.

Typically, the highest risk places have challenges such as conflict, unrest, terrorism, high rates of crime, poor infrastructure or are experiencing disease outbreaks or natural disasters. The UK government's Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) tends to advise against travel, or essential only travel to these areas. For extreme risk locations it is common for insurers to also have exclusions or restrictions.

Sometimes the high-risk rating may apply to the whole country, but often it can be regionalised with some regions being safer. For this reason, access to regionally specific information is recommended when considering travel to such locations.

# Travel Risk Calculator

The trip risk calculator has been developed to help institutions and travellers to understand the risk profile of their planned travel. It is not a risk assessment, rather it gives illustrations of trip characteristics at risk levels ranging from negligible risk to extreme.

This tool can be used to inform travel decision making processes and as a tool for communicating with staff and students about travel risk.

Institutions are encouraged to adapt this to suit their risk appetite and approval processes.

For example, some institutions may prefer to merge columns into high, medium, and low risk, adapt terminology or add references to their systems and requirements within the text.

The descriptions could also be used to inform filter questions embedded into travel approval processes.

Consideration of travel risk should be encouraged at the planning stages of every project requiring travel (e.g., research project, international partnership etc.) to ensure that the risks are understood and that the logistical and the resource requirements to mitigate them will be achievable.

| Risk factor | Low | Moderate | High | Extreme |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Place: Security** | The risk rating for the destination is negligible/minimal to low. Rates of crime are low and non-violent. Effective emergency & security services Little to no civil unrest with no associated violence. Political stability is unlikely to deteriorate. Terrorism activity unlikely. | The risk rating for the destination is medium or moderate. Opportunistic crime/cybercrime is common but violent crime is infrequent. Police able to respond to crime inc. cyber in urban areas. Politically stable with some periodic protests/low level violence. Sporadic terrorist/ militant activity. Rumours of human rights violations. | The risk rating for the destination is high. The FCDO advise against all but essential travel to the region. High rates of opportunistic and violent crime. Extortion &/or cybercrime are common. Limited police capability and high levels of corruption. Political situation is fragile, regular violent unrest with potential to deteriorate into conflict. Events e.g., elections occurring during trip. High likelihood of terrorist/militant activity. History of rights violations. Insurer review required; may require extra premiums. | The risk rating for the destination is extreme or severe. FCDO advise against all travel. State of war; law & order minimal/non-existent, ongoing armed conflict. Continuous threat from terrorist or militant groups. Authoritarian regime, with a history of arresting academics. Insurer will not cover travel. |
| **Place: Environment** | Good infrastructure: reliable widespread utility/comms. Extensive transport networks with good safety record. High quality medical facilities inc. specialisms like mental health. No specific health risks. Air quality, food & water usually safe. Natural disasters/hazardous seasonal weather very unlikely. | Moderate infrastructure: Usually reliable utilities/comms and transport networks across the country. Road safety lower outside main urban areas. Endemic diseases (vaccination/ treatment is available) present, medical facilities adequate but limited for mental health. Low risk of natural disaster/seasonal hazards but good response capabilities. | Basic infrastructure: Utility/comms networks present in main cities but can unreliable. Road safety is poor, public transport not recommended. Endemic disease present (vaccination/treatment is available). Medical facilities outside the main urban areas very limited. Mental Health assistance not widely available. Air quality occasionally hazardous. Low risk of natural disaster/seasonal hazards - limited response capacity. Some known areas of landmines etc. | Weak infrastructure: Unreliable/scarce utility/comms networks. Under-developed road network; serious safety concerns for air and ground transport. Basic healthcare facilities: evacuation for serious issues High levels of endemic disease/outbreaks. Air quality often hazardous to people with cardio/respiratory illnesses. High potential for natural disasters/ seasonal hazards with little response capability. Extensive areas of landmines etc. or environmental contamination. |
| **People: Traveller profile** | The traveller has no personal characteristics which increase risk. They have experience of the area or similar region and are familiar with the environment and culture. The traveller will be supported in country (e.g., family & friends, local partners, guides, NGOs etc.). | Traveller profile could lead to infrequent verbal harassment or questioning but is unlikely to lead to violent targeting or arrest. The traveller has health/disability need which local facilities can meet. The traveller is unfamiliar with the region but has travelled in other areas or will be supported by others who are experienced (e.g., colleagues, local partners, guides etc.). | The traveller has personal characteristics which some groups are intolerant of giving a foreseeable risk of harassment, verbal abuse, and extortion. The traveller has health/disability needs which may not be fully met by facilities at the destination. Some factors of the travel are rated high or extreme (e.g., location, activities, purpose etc.) **and** the traveller either has no experience of travel in this or similar environments **or** has no support available in country. | The traveller has personal characteristics which are not tolerated by local culture/laws with a risk of violent attacks and imprisonment. The traveller has significant health/disability needs which cannot be met by local facilities. Some factors of the travel are rated high or extreme (e.g., location, activities, purpose etc.) **and** the traveller has no experience of travel in this or similar environments **and** has no support available in country. |
| **Purpose: Activities** | Activities bear little or no influence on risk (e.g., office work, attending a conference or business meeting etc.) and booked via University's travel booking company which verifies safety standards of suppliers. | Activities may involve travel outside the workplace but accompanied and in a place with good infrastructure. Extensive driving on generally safe roads in daylight using a vetted supplier. Area has good infrastructure but suppliers for transport, hotels etc. booked outside contract and without verification of safety standards. | Activities involve work in potentially hazardous terrain (e.g., remote area, refugee camps) or potentially hazardous work (e.g., construction, social work). Work may be unaccompanied but there are good communications and emergency arrangements. Extensive driving inc. at night/in poor road safety/high crime/remote areas where the vehicle/ driver/route was been vetted. Suppliers of transport, hotels etc. booked outside contract/without duty of care checks in moderate infrastructure area. | Activities involve working in hazardous terrain, hazardous work, or the deception of authorities. It involves working alone with no reliable communications/emergency support plans. Extensive driving inc. at night and/or areas of poor road safety/high crime/remote areas without vetting of vehicle/driver/route. Suppliers for transport, hotels etc. booked outside contract/duty of care checks and without verification of safety in basic/weak infrastructure area. |
| **Purpose: Subject & Acceptance** | The purpose of the trip is not controversial. Subject is widely discussed in public spheres. Local perceptions of the HEI and partner organisations are positive and supportive of the traveller and their safety. | Government has controversial policies or actions relating to trip purpose/research topic but would have limited implications if discussed in public. Local communities whose acceptance is required have neutral perceptions and the likelihood of hostility is low. | The trip purpose/research topic is perceived as being sensitive by communities and authorities and is not discussed in public spheres/tolerated by government. Local communities whose acceptance is required have negative perceptions of the University, HE or partner organisation and there is some potential for hostility. | Purpose of the trip/research topic is illegal in-country, and those involved could face arrest or imprisonment. Perceptions of the University/HE sector/partner organisations are highly negative and would not be tolerated by community groups/authorities with high potential for violence. |

# Implications for Travel Approval

Travel policies and approval process should clearly define the level of risks tolerable to the organisation, which could be different for specific sections of the HEI's community (e.g., UG students/PG students/staff).

It is recommended that travel approval processes consider risk level and include an escalation through the line management chain to ensure the risk is within organisational risk appetite. This should enable consideration of the risks involved and the reasons/benefits of undertaking the activity (i.e., business case).

It is recommended processes take the highest single risk factor as the overall level of risk (i.e., if any factor is high, the trip is also high).

The calculator can be adapted to support organisations to communicate risk as part of their process.

Where there are significant risks (e.g., high or extreme factors on the calculator), approval processes should include a requirement for a risk assessment to enable appropriately detailed consideration of the specific threats relevant to the trip and evaluate the effectiveness of planned mitigations.

Guidance on the risk assessment process and recommended mitigations is being developed.

If high risk travel is within the organisational risk tolerance, approval should be informed by a review of the proposed travel which has been carried out by a competent person. Organisations that are willing to permit the highest levels of risk are recommended to ensure sufficient travel risk management expertise is available at a professional level.

There is guidance about training and competency in ISO 31030 Annex E.

The table sets out a model for approval and review escalation levels, based upon management levels set out in the USHA's Leadership and Management of Health and Safety in HEIs.

| Risk Level | Approval Level | Review Level (if required) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low** | Line Manager | N/A |
| **Medium** | Head of Dept/ Line Manager | N/A |
| **High** | Senior Leader | Internally trained staff should review the risk assessment and decide if professional travel risk review is required (for example, if multiple factors are high risk or there is a query about whether the risk has been sufficiently mitigated). |
| **Extreme** | Executive | It is strongly recommended that a professional travel risk advisor is consulted as part of approval of any extreme risk travel. |

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All web addresses referenced in this standard were accessible as of the publication date.

# USHA

**Universities Safety and Health Association**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**The panel wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support from**

**Mel Boucher (Chair), London School of Economics**

**Karen Lawrence (Chair), Coventry University**

**Alice Smith and Sarah Watson, University of Nottingham**

**Alison Weeks, University of the West of England**

**Joy Obgunude, Aston University**

**Niamh Nelson, University of Westminster**

**Sheena MacKinnon, Open University**

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# Peregrine
### Risk Management

November 2023

This guidance can be downloaded from the **www.usha.org.uk** website.