

Security guidelines

for field research in complex,
remote and hazardous places



Dorothea Hilhorst
Lucy Hodgson
Bram Jansen
Rodrigo Mena

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International Institute of Social Studies

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Authors

Dorothea Hilhorst
Lucy Hodgson
Bram Jansen
Rodrigo Mena

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The authors

Dorothea Hilhorst is professor of Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction at the International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her publications focus on the everyday practices of humanitarian aid, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, reconstruction and peace building. She has coordinated research programmes in Angola, DRC, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique and Uganda. She has also published on methodology of research in fragile settings (Haar, G. van der, A. Heijmans and D. Hilhorst 2013 Knowledge claims in conflict. Disasters, 37S1, S20-S35). She has supervised more than 20 PhD projects in hazardous or complex environments. She is president of the International Humanitarian Studies Association (info@ihsa.info).

E-mail: hilhorst@iss.nl; **twitter:** @hilhorst_thea

Lucy Hodgson is a director of Clarity Security Training, a UK company providing security training and consultancy to the relief and development sector. Her background is as a Humanitarian relief worker and programme manager with over 20 years experience in the sector at both field and HQ level. She has worked on a range of humanitarian relief projects overseas in countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Rwanda, Congo, Burundi Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Banda-Aceh and Kenya. Since 2001 her focus has largely been on Security Risk Management, as a Security Programme Manager for RedR (2001 to 2006), as an independent consultant and for Clarity Security Training.

E-mail: lucyhodg@gmail.com

Bram J. Jansen is assistant professor of Disaster Studies at the Sociology of Development and Change group at Wageningen university in the Netherlands, where he lectures and writes on humanitarian and refugee issues. He conducted ethnographic fieldwork in East and the Horn of Africa, mostly in Kenya, where he wrote a PhD dissertation on the urbanisation of protracted refugee camps, entitled The accidental city: violence, economy and humanitarianism in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya (2011), and more recently in South Sudan, where he studied humanitarian governance and the negotiation of insecurity.

E-mail: bramj.jansen@wur.nl

Rodrigo Mena is a socio-environmental researcher, currently involved in the project "When disasters meet conflict" at the International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. His main focus is on humanitarian aid response to disasters occurring in high-intensity conflict-affected scenarios. Along with fieldwork in hostile, complex and remote areas, he has led humanitarian aid groups and conducted research after the occurrence of several natural disasters. As the author of articles and book chapters, his research focuses on resilience and vulnerability to socio-natural disasters and conflict, as well as on applied fieldwork research.

E-mail: mena@iss.nl

Introduction¹

When conducting field-based research or *fieldwork*, researchers often operate within complex and dynamic social and political contexts, and derive their data from that environment. Both the quality of research and the security of the researcher are a function of how well-planned the research is, taking into account the local context and the risk environment.

This manual is designed to assist researchers in conducting their research in hazardous, remote or complex environments as safely and securely as possible, both for those working within their home country, or as foreigners. The focus of this manual is on the individual researcher, yet takes into account that the researchers' security planning is usually within the organisational procedures and processes of home or host organisations, designed to enhance the security of research staff and programmes.

The manual is meant for all researchers engaging in fieldwork. Some specific guidelines may be more appropriate for expatriate researchers (such as visa information), but we emphasize that most of the risks addressed in this manual can also apply to researchers working in their home country, especially those whose home and normal residence is elsewhere, and those who work in a remote or hazardous part of their own country.

Considerations of security are obvious for researchers working in conflict environments. However, this manual is meant for researchers operating both in volatile environments and in areas not considered particularly hazardous. Many of the hazards discussed also apply in apparently stable areas, that may, however, however be very violent, or suddenly become so. Situations can deteriorate into instability within a period of days, weeks or months. In addition, seemingly ordinary health and safety concerns may take on extraordinary significance in precarious environments without proper awareness and risk management planning in advance. While researchers may be well aware of some security threats in their fieldwork environment, it is common for them (or their home institutions, insurance providers, or others) to misjudge or misprioritize those concerns. To err in this regard is human – no one can know all the risks present in all circumstances – but it makes proper preparation and risk management planning all the more critical to the success of a research programme.

Researchers reading this manual are thus encouraged to focus on those aspects that are relevant to their own research situation. 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,' as the saying goes, and this is particularly true when applied to the spectre of dealing with safety and security emergencies in remote and unstable environments.

Security incidents and security related decisions can have an influence not just on the security of the researcher and the research outcomes, but also on the security of the respondents, local assistants and interpreters, the home and host organizations, and research sponsors. It is therefore essential that researchers plan their research taking into account the risk environment, and remain security aware throughout.

¹ This manual came about in the framework of the research programme '[When Disasters meet Conflict](#)', which is financed by the Netherlands Organisation of Academic Research (NWO). The authors also acknowledge the support of the International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) and the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), and we thank Linda Johnson, Rachel Gordon, Paul Harvey and Cristobal Mena for their feedback and corrections.

Field research always carries a degree of risk, that may jeopardise security and affect the quality of the research. This places responsibilities on researchers with regard to the methodological and ethical choices they make.

This manual was written by three academics with a long track-record of fieldwork in disaster or conflict situations, and a security expert (Lucy Hodgson). The manual was motivated by our experience that researchers tend to largely rely for their security on their cordial relations with research participants. While this is arguably the most important aspect of security, we want to stress that risk management requires more cautious attention. There are many security manuals, but these rarely take account of the special conditions of field-based research.

The manual is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the particular security considerations posed by field-based research and suggests a set of ethical guidelines for field-based research. Section two is a field manual and details how to conduct context analysis and risk assessment as well as how to plan and stay healthy during the course of field research. The final section is largely comprised of checklists and key considerations to assist researchers in managing their own personal security, both in terms of preventive and reactive measures.

This manual does not replace the need for organisational and individual security planning and training, but can be used to support and guide it. Many sections speak of home and host organisations. Home organisation is the institute where the researcher belongs, whereas the host organisation facilitates the research in the area where it takes place. The host and home organisation could be the same. When these are different institutions, i.e. when the research takes place in another (part of the) country, it has to be clear whose security policies prevail and who has the duty of care for the researcher.

One final warning before we start. These guidelines bring together a great many risks, that most researchers will never encounter during their entire time of fieldwork. Chapter 4 provides a three-step method of mapping the risks that are appropriate for the specific setting you will be working in. You may not encounter most of these risks in reality, but it is good to prepare for them nonetheless. While we maintain that preparing for risks is a good thing for all researchers, it is good to remember that fieldwork is often a wonderful, rich and safe experience, that is to be enjoyed!



Research and security

1. Research and security

Generally speaking, security measures can be categorised into hard and soft security measures. Protection and deterrence strategies are hard measures and use weapons or armed guards, barbed wire and fortified compounds, and other physical barriers for protection. This approach primarily views the environment as hostile, and aims to minimize interaction with it. 'Acceptance' strategies, on the other hand, assume that being accepted allows for reliance on local relations and knowledge, and is a better shield against insecurity than hiding behind barbed wire, and abiding by strict security codes (Van Brabant, 2000). These are softer measures that aim at maintaining cordial relations with people and the local environment.

Field-based research, especially in the ethnographic tradition, usually leans on soft security measures, consistent with the methodology and ethics of this type of research. At the same time, it remains important to prepare for and reduce risk, which may include abiding by 'harder' security measures of host organisations, UN or NGOs actors, or governments, if specific circumstances so require.

Fieldwork depends on people. Research, ethics, security, the wellbeing of the researchers and their informants and the reputation of host or supporting organisations are all interconnected. This puts special responsibility on researchers to treat people with respect and refrain from endangering their security. This is, of course, an ethical issue, but it also true that treating people with care and respect helps to build the trustful relationship that is needed to obtain reliable information and persuade people to share their stories. Fostering respectful relations has a direct bearing on the researcher's security as it enhances access to security information and can mean people are more likely to warn or help you out in case of danger. The reputation of the research is also linked to the conduct and reputation of those engaged in the research project, including the researchers, assistants and participant organizations.

One important aspect of security is awareness of the image of themselves and their institutions that researchers project in the field. Being associated with affluence, or with certain institutions that are considered affluent or may be associated with particular political interests, may lead to overexposure to danger in the field. Awareness of one's own limits, skills and profile is essential for the self-care attitude that every researcher should develop. All of these elements can contribute to a more confident environment for data gathering.

Preparatory phase

Security considerations play a role from the beginning of planning research. A main driver in selecting research projects and fieldwork sites and activities is the feasibility of the research. Security considerations may inhibit the research of certain topics, or disallow certain methodologies. Participant observation, participatory data gathering, or surveys are not feasible in all contexts. Security may also affect the degree of logistical support needed for research. When there is no transport, or transport is severely restricted by poor road conditions, the frequency of roadblocks, etc., research may not be possible.

Security should be an integral part of research designs and proposals. Increasingly, research permission, from the home and/or host organisation is made conditional on the development of a robust risk assessment and risk reduction measures. Home organisations differ in terms of the security services they provide, and researchers may find themselves having to organize their own security back-ups and appropriate insurance.

Researchers also need to prepare themselves. Reading a security manual is not enough, and security training for research is of paramount importance. Such training can be more or less intensive, depending on the security profile of the area of research. Research in remote areas often means that clinics and ambulance services may not be found around the corner, and a first aid training (and an up-to-date first aid kit that all team members know and have access to) is useful for most researchers. Remember that traffic accidents are often the most significant risk in many areas.

Fieldwork

Relationships in the field

A researcher needs to establish diverse networks in the field, although care must be taken when establishing these. A range of different contacts developed before and during the fieldwork will enable researchers to cross-check and triangulate information, both for the purposes of their research and their security. Networking also means developing awareness of the agendas and social positions of actors in the research area.

Special challenges with data gathering in conflict-affected areas

Methodology handbooks provide many directives for field-based research, with a direct bearing on security. Careful preparation and introductions into the field and the ethical principles of informed consent, for example, may help to reduce suspicion that could otherwise lead to security risks.

Not all methodology books have sections on research in conflict-affected areas. In these areas, some of the challenges of data-gathering become more pronounced and may more easily translate into risks. This often means that researchers may not do their research according to the book, but instead seek creative methodological solutions. This may create balancing acts, where methodological restrictions need to be reconciled with upholding scientific rigour and ethics, as well as safety and practicality.

In a politicized environment, research can become part of political struggles. Researchers may be perceived as having no clear business in the area, and asking questions and collecting data can cause strong suspicion. Researchers have been associated with, and used for, intelligence gathering, spying or manipulation of populations for political actors (see for instance Price 2007). Negative experiences of such kind in the past history of the research area may affect people's attitude to research. Hence, collecting information from the field should not be taken lightly, and the practices and methods we use must be carefully selected.

Researchers are often offered broker positions, and they can become part of strife over loyalty between different people or groups of people. Apart from their own

relations in the research area, researchers also need to consider the social position of their local colleagues, such as co-researchers, translators and drivers. If these people are controversial, the researcher will become controversial as a consequence. This has to be taken into account in the planning of research, and requires researchers in these contexts to be extra-reflective. Van Brabant noted that 'it is important to ask how your presence, your programming and your positioning, as revealed through formal and informal statements, affect the (perceived) interests of other actors and what that means for your security' (2000: 40).

Whereas openness of research and informed consent is a first operational principle of research ethics, there are exceptional situations where such transparency is not (completely) possible. There are no unequivocal solutions to such ethical choices, but it is important to make such choices subject to peer-review and part of the methodological and ethical reports on the research.

In the realm of anthropology and other disciplines relying on prolonged periods of deeply immersed fieldwork, the question whether, and to what extent, researchers should identify with or distance themselves from the people they study, has gained much attention, with the concepts of *cultural relativity* and *ethnocentrism* marking the two ends of the spectrum of moral realities. It needs to be realised that this tension also has implications for researchers relations and wellbeing in the field, and hence for security risks. A certain identification with the people researched is necessary to create the ambiance of trust and to enable researchers to respectfully grasp people's points of view. Over-identification can lead to bias, which may also bring about suspicion among parties more distant from the researcher.

Conflict-affected areas are often characterized by a heightened prevalence of confusion and rumour, which may complicate reliable data gathering. Researchers can deliberately be subject to propaganda. Not taking data at face-value requires stringent methodological scrutiny.

Interviewing and surveying is about probing: pursuing lines of questioning, and asking things in different direct and indirect ways. However, conflict-affected areas, research subjects have often suffered loss and harm and may be traumatized by past events. Researchers should realize that questioning people about these events can have a profound adverse impact on them. As researchers, we must act in ways that take care of our informants and attempt to avoid causing them problems resulting from their participation.

Another challenge with research in conflict-affected areas concerns accessing the appropriate informants and respondents. Where access is very restricted, remote research techniques may be helpful, though there is as yet very little guidance on how to build reliable research with these techniques. It is also important to be conscious of the ways in which remote techniques may not diminish risk so much as transfer it to others, such as local research 'partners.'

Finally, using photography, voice recording and even taking notes may be complicated and evoke risk in some areas. In a highly politicised environment, it might be unwise to be seen *mapping* the environment using photographic or film material, let alone photographing or filming military and military equipment (which should never be done without explicit official permission). Being photographed with specific

actors such as military groups or rebels can be misused and bring about problems for the research, the researcher's safety and even the safety of the co-workers of the researcher. Similarly, taking notes or voice recording could be sensitive research techniques, requiring alternative techniques and flexibility on the part of the researcher. Mobile phones can be used for voice memos and notes can be made in the margins of newspapers or books, so as not to lose valuable information. Creativity to adapt ways of obtaining information, while safeguarding rapport with the research community is a primary skill that researchers in challenging settings must develop.

Data treatment and storage

Personal, sensitive or secret information should be treated with great respect. It is very important to realize that promises of confidentiality and anonymity as a way to mitigate these concerns, are more easily made than kept.

How data is stored and transported should be considered with attention. Small data storage devices, such as *pen-drives*, flash memories or recorders can easily get lost, involving not only the loss of information and data, but also security risks for informants or affiliated institutions. Consider safe and reliable ways of storing sensitive information, for example, encryption or using passwords. Good planning is required for the creation of backups when internet is weak or absent.

Security issues do not end with the fieldwork. Researchers returning from the field may feel post-fieldwork stress and so-called 'reverse culture shock' (reviewed in more detail in the next section). In addition, there are issues to take into account in the reporting and dissemination of findings. This process is certainly part of the field work experience and demands planning and care, as our wellbeing should also be safeguarded.

Reporting and dissemination

Reporting fieldwork

In this first step to account for fieldwork, consider what information is sensitive, if it is to be presented to other actors in the same field or shared publicly.

The report of the undertaken research must be conducted in accordance with scientific principles. This means proper and validated use of data, accountability for the methods of data gathering, and sharing and verifying the results with key stakeholders. Consulting research respondents on the results is fairly common, but the question is what to do when disagreement arises between the researcher and the respondents².

In case such conflicts arise, one of the issues to take into account is the implication for future researchers and the well-being of the researched community.

Presenting results

Responsible dissemination of results is important for researchers, the communities or people involved, and the wider academic community. However, especially in highly politicised environments, the impact of dissemination has to be carefully assessed, so

² See for illustration of the above presented dilemma the epilogue of Hilhorst 2003.

as to avoid endangering people. Anonymity of informants and assistants and respecting confidentiality are oft-used and acceptable measures.

Feedback to stakeholders and respondents

Similar to the process of reporting fieldwork and the presentation of results, is the process of presenting feedback or knowledge about the research outcomes to different stakeholders and respondents. Governments, local institutions, local people and a range of other actors may have provided information and expect to know the results. This can be challenging, especially in the case of sensitive data or when stakeholders are difficult to reach.

Dissemination must thus be carefully assessed, and it is recommended to have a plan of providing feedback *before* fieldwork is undertaken. This helps to avoid making false promises about feedback and provides researchers with a guideline to make informed decisions about what information can be shared, with whom and in which ways.

Ethical guidelines for research in hazardous and (post-) conflict environments

There are different codes of conduct for research, and each has its merits for different purposes. The section below builds on these codes, and proposes 6 ethical guidelines for research in hazardous environments. Working in volatile zones puts high demands on the flexibility and creativity of researchers. These ethical standards can assist in those demands and guide decision-making in the field.

1. Respect the dignity of research subjects, their culture and their environment

Respect for people's dignity must be the primary principle when considering methodology, security and ethics. Research subjects are people with their own values and understandings of their actions and the world around them. Researchers should respect this, and engage in dialogue on the aim of the research, the collection and analysis of findings and the use of research results. Research subjects that severely breach the values of researchers, for example war criminals or gross violators of human rights, nonetheless deserve to be treated with the same respect as any other individuals, in acknowledging their points of views in research. Researchers are required to respect the principles of informed consent and openness of research. There are exceptions when conditions, research questions or respondents demand covert research techniques. This can only be considered after careful deliberation, and must be accounted for in the results.

It is also relevant to respect the environment, natural resources and culture of the places where fieldwork is conducted. Ways of behaving, dressing or acting need to be respectful in relation to all of these aspects.

Considering that many researchers may engage in your domain and area of research, it is good practice to carefully consider whether fieldwork is actually required or that sufficient data exist for the purpose of the research.

2. Safety first for researchers, research assistants and informants

Safety of researchers, assistants and informants is another top priority. In any situation, 'rules of engagement' have to be discussed and roles and responsibilities must be clear. This is especially important in cases of emergencies, such as evacuation, hospitalization or repatriation. The presence of the researcher in the field can have repercussions for the security of other people. Researchers have to be aware of this and act in accordance, to avoid endangering assistants, informants and people from the wider community.

3. Respect and avoid doing harm to the position and reputation of research organisations

Most research is accommodated or assigned by a host organization. This organization often has other ongoing activities in the same environment where the research takes place. Researchers should endeavour to avoid damage to ongoing activities, and respect established working relations, including those with local authorities. It has to be recognized that hospitality and assistance are not indefinite, and that researchers should be modest in demanding time and energy from their hosts.

4. Respect the principles of empirical research

Scientific research is bound by rules. Researchers are responsible for not violating the standards of their discipline. They should consider the complications of data gathering in conflict situations and be aware of the social implications of their research.

5. Act responsibly in the dissemination of research results

By the dissemination and sharing of research results, researchers give their results to a larger social community. This should be done in scientific and socially responsive ways. It must be recognized that by sharing data, risks can develop for informants, assistants and the larger community. Avoiding harm overrules the norm of transparency of (raw) data as researchers are in the first place bound to protect the security of their respondents. Ensure that any representation of the research displays respect of the people and cultures studied.

6. Recognize the dynamics of being part of the research situation

Research is a two-way process, and researchers play different roles in the research environment. People may endeavour to have their vision represented, try to bend the research into desired directions and enrol researchers to act on their behalf as broker to the outside world. Researchers must be prepared for people to form their own interpretation of the identity and objectives of the researcher, which may lead to distrust or false expectations.

Researchers seeking social, political or professional engagement with the researched communities beyond the research, need to prioritise the integrity of their research and safeguard the quality of data-gathering and analysis.



2. Field manual

Security awareness and effective research go hand in hand. Planning and implementing research in a context appropriate manner, will not only improve the quality of the research, but will assist you to carry it out in a safe manner. The procedures and guidelines in this section, and the following section on checklists, are designed to assist researchers to develop an awareness of their own personal security, as well as to understand how their actions influence the environment and the security of others, and can influence the research outcomes.

Preparation

Security policy and home or host organisation

Security planning is part of the preparatory process. Security planning is often nested in security policies of the home organisation and/or the host organisation of the researcher, but need not stop there. If these organizations have no or only a general security policy, researchers need to devise their own or a complementary policy. For this, they can rely on organizations specialised in services for security in research³.

A responsible employer should strive at all times to identify, manage and reduce risks and prioritize security, safety and health of staff and consultants as paramount. When reviewing your home or host organisation's security policy, these are the elements you should be able to expect:

Objectives of a security policy

- To state principles in relation to the management of security.
- To outline the core areas of security risk to staff and operations.
- To describe the overarching framework for the effective management of staff security.

Key elements of a security policy

- The importance the organization places on staff security, and what it will strive to do to reduce the risk to staff and consultants as they go about their work.
- A statement as to the organisation's acceptable threshold of risk. Risk should be proportionate to the type of activity that we are involved in. Risk must be carefully weighed against programmatic benefits in each location.
- Provision for adequate insurance coverage to meet the needs of staff, and clarity about what is not covered.
- An outline of who is responsible for what aspects of staff security
- Collaboration on security issues: with whom, and extent of information sharing/support and resources on security.

Know yourself

Carrying out good fieldwork requires a level of reflection and self-awareness. Initially, researchers may have a romantic vision of fieldwork, but once in the field, they can discover that they do not feel comfortable in those scenarios. Thus, before you commit to conducting research in a difficult or remote environment, you need to consider your motivations and capacity to achieve your goals.

³ For example, GCORE (www.gcore.com) or The Centre for Safety and Development (www.centreforsafety.org).

Context and risk analysis

An understanding of the context is essential to be able to accurately assess risk. A researcher needs to be inquisitive about the environment where the research is being conducted, pertaining directly to the research project but also about the location, its history, politics, population and culture. Consider also how you as a researcher or field-worker, the research project, and any host organization may be perceived within this context.

Context analysis is an ongoing process. It is part of the selection of research sites, starts before departure and continues throughout the fieldwork period. An initial contextual assessment should be conducted prior to leaving for the field, and this should be regularly updated to take into account additional information, observations and recent developments. Researchers should understand, as far as possible, the political and cultural context – both national and local – in which they are operating and be aware of the security situation (including crime), and the economic and natural environment. Inappropriate or offensive behavior – even if not intended as such – can pose a risk to the researchers and may potentially jeopardize the research project.

A further checklist for conducting a context assessment, is included in section 3.

Researchers working within their own context, or who are in the field for extended time periods, may fail to spot subtle changes in the context, due to having become habituated to it. Beware of the ‘frog-in-the-boiling-water’ syndrome – the phenomenon that frogs thrown into hot water immediately jump out, whereas frogs in water that is gradually heated stay in the water until the boiling point is reached because they fail to notice the change. In other words: beware of getting adjusted to risk levels that are unacceptable. Ask yourself regularly if you would advise a fellow researcher (or a friend or relative) to come and visit you. If the answer is: ‘No, that would be too dangerous’, reconsider your decision to stay on.

To help you respond adequately to changes, it is recommended to revisit your risk-assessment and security-plan every two weeks to detect and think through changes that are occurring. You should also share and discuss your risk assessment with others within and outside of the environment of the research to double-check your information and assumptions.

In challenging environments, situations can change very quickly. Try to develop indicators as part of your risk assessment. These might be things such as increased troop movements, media coverage, an increase in crime rate etc. Although these changes are largely unpredictable, preparedness for sudden events is possible and important.

Risk assessment and risk reduction

Risk assessment(s) should be made for all research in hazardous areas. In our everyday lives we reduce risk, often subconsciously, by finding ways to avoid hazards or difficulties. In a professional fieldwork situation, a more formal process is required. This will help you to identify the potential threats in your location, and determine to which threats you are most vulnerable. With this understanding and good contextual knowledge, you can then take effective measures and make informed decisions to reduce risk.

Decide on the risk reduction measures that you plan to employ during your research, before, during, and after the fieldwork. If any of these require action by others, ensure that you liaise with and inform them in advance to clarify expectations. Remember to update your risk assessment each time there is a significant change in the context, or in your activities.

Risk assessments should include a detailed account of all possible threats and vulnerabilities associated with fieldwork. Some of this can be related to the researcher, others with the environment and context and others with the institutions. They may be as serious as terrorist threats or as seemingly mundane (but problematic!). A checklist on how to conduct a risk assessment, along with a template is to be found in section 3.

Emergency planning

Even in the most prepared research scenarios, based on a thoughtful risk assessment, emergencies or dangerous situations may occur during fieldwork. There may also be emergencies at home that require immediate contact with the researcher when s/he is out of communications range.

Emergency response must also be part of security-planning. Consider training to assess the ways in which you deal with uncertainty and emergencies, and to acquire new tools and skills to increase your capacity.

During emergency situations, the ability to communicate effectively and quickly with others is essential, but not always readily available. Check carefully what emergency preparedness and services your home or host organization is providing, and be prepared to develop your own communications plan for emergencies. Your plan should be shared and agreed with key stakeholders, such as research assistants, drivers, supervisors, sponsors, hosts or other organizations. It is recommended that you test these communication mechanisms and action plans in case of emergency before leaving to go on fieldwork, and again after arrival (particularly in the case of mobile or satellite phones). Be realistic in setting your own and others’ expectations regarding communication; technology in the field often fails to function as it ‘should.’ Have backup plans in place. And, if you are not comfortable going ‘off the grid,’ then reassess your research plans accordingly.

Consider using GPS equipment that indicates your whereabouts hence informing others of where you are, in case of an emergency. Some technologies allow you to be tracked all the time, every 15 minutes or any other specified period of time. These same devices also enable you to send emergency text messages through satellite, even without a mobile signal. Third parties can even use your own mobile phone for these purposes⁴.

Always remember to keep key people informed when fieldwork deviates from previous plans in ways that may pose some risk. As mentioned, prevention and safety should be first priority; do not hesitate to alert others if something out of the ordinary or concerning takes place.

⁴ Example of these satellite devices are AST-SatComms, SPOT-Gen and Delorme-inReach. Example of third parties using your own mobile phone (or at AST devices) is the Field Connect-GCORE application, available for Android and iPhone devices.

Ultimately, when the conditions of insecurity are widespread in the areas, region or country where fieldwork is being conducted, plans to exit or to be evacuated must be considered. Evaluate these strategies carefully with colleagues and key stakeholders and make sure that the arrangement with regards to the duty of care in case of emergencies is clear to all involved. If possible, lay down this arrangement in a written agreement. Make sure you understand how insurance and evacuation services operate (e.g. will you need to pay cash up front to a healthcare facility in an emergency and get receipts to be reimbursed later by insurance?) and what numbers to call; memorize phone numbers where possible, in addition to programming them into phones and carrying paper copies of them.

Trip planning, travel and transport

Fieldwork is often comprised of multiple trips and each trip must be planned carefully before departure. Research the context you are visiting and analyse how you and your research will be perceived within this context. Think about all stages of your departure from and arrival at the field site. Decide on appropriate travel procedures, including the type of vehicle to travel in, and procedures for travel, and ensure any drivers are properly briefed of the route in order to take appropriate security measures. Make sure someone is aware of the itinerary, and establish a communication plan with them, including giving them key contact details, and discussing in advance what to do in case of loss of contact.

Road travel

In (post-) disaster areas, traffic accidents may be a bigger risk than violence. It is known that most of the accidents suffered by aid-workers occur whilst travelling. This is one of the points at which we are most vulnerable⁵. It is therefore vital to reduce risk in this area. Before selecting a means of transport, ensure that the vehicle and equipment are as fit as possible for the intended purpose. A car that is suitable for use in town, is unlikely to be appropriate for a long field trip over difficult terrain. The local situation is best assessed by asking your host and other local informants. When the situation is very fluid, inquire about the roads again just before departure.

Air travel

In a post-disaster or conflict-affected environment, there can be increased risks associated with air-travel, due to limited infrastructure, poorly maintained aircraft or poor safety standards. Where possible, minimise this risk by selecting reputable airlines with a good safety record. If there are concerns over the safety of certain air-carriers, and limited options, check this with other organisations, and discuss other options to minimise the risk. Take account of local weather when planning travel. If you do have serious concerns about a particular flight due to overloading or mechanical soundness, do not board that flight. If the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) or equivalent such as the Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), or other NGO charters have operations in the country, get hold of information about possibilities to fly with them, in agreement with your host.

Travelling with a driver

When travelling with a driver, make sure you know something about him/her: how

⁵ In humanitarian emergencies too, the majority of serious incidents resulting in death or injury happen on the road (Stoddard, Harmer & Ryou 2014)

has s/he been contracted and what is his/her experience with the route. This is highly relevant to ensure a safe trip. Ensure you are able to communicate. Drivers are often a good source of information, and they get to handle a lot of sensitive information about our research: who we visited and when, our routes and times. Try to establish a relationship of trust and mutual respect with those who are involved in frequent travel.

Alternative routes, road conditions and vehicle checks must be conducted on a regular base and always when the researcher is about to engage in long or risky trips. Protocols on check points and permits that may be required should always be considered when trips will be made to or through unknown destinations/routes. A trip planning checklist is included in section 3.

Walking

- If you are walking, take the following into account:
- If the area is unfamiliar, seek reliable advice on where you can walk safely. Familiarise yourself with a map of the area.
- Try to avoid walking alone, or at night, unless you are sure it is safe to do so.
- Walk with confidence and assurance, remain alert.
- Use well-travelled, well-lit routes, if possible.
- Avoid walking too close to dark areas, where danger could be concealed. When walking at night in a rural area, bring a torch to see your way, spot animals and to make yourself visible to vehicles.
- Often street criminals work in groups/pairs and may employ distraction techniques to catch you off your guard – be alert for this.
- Do not carry unnecessary valuables, large amounts of cash or display signs of wealth.

Key points for travel

- When you travel to the field, explain where you go, and what you will do. Leave an itinerary with your host organisation or another trusted organisation/ person.
- Inform people at home about where you are going and how long you anticipate being out of email and/or telephone contact.
- Make sure you have information about the risks of public transport. In some areas it is not advisable to take taxis for risk of being robbed or attacked by the driver. Get local advice on the more reliable providers.
- When driving your own car, ensure it is in good mechanical condition and well maintained. Check oil, water, tyres, brakes and fuel regularly and always prior to any long trip. Do not assume that fuel will be available in rural areas; carry extra if necessary.
- Ensure that the vehicle has a tool kit, a first aid kit, spare water, emergency rations and any other essential equipment
- Ensure that seatbelts are available and that you wear one at all times
- Before you go on a trip, think about the locations you will be driving through and the risks involved. How would you cope with any of the potential situations that could arise? How could you avoid these situations in the first place?
- Plan for any checkpoints or known hazards en route.
- Plan for delays and have food, water and medicine in sufficient quantities in case the trip is longer than expected. Be prepared in case route blockages mean staying in the car overnight.

- Ensure that you have relevant documentation for yourself, any passengers and the vehicle. Keep copies of these.
- Establish a communications plan for use when travelling. Notify others of travel times, destinations and steps they should take if you are late/do not contact them.
- Take time to plan the journey and to prepare what you need to take with you (including ample drinking water). Think about route alternatives and rest-stops (including breaks for drivers)
- Do not use armed escorts, without discussing and agreeing this with the host organisation and your supervisor. These may create an illusion of security, while actually raising your profile and suggesting to would-be assailants that you have something worth stealing. In addition, it may be difficult to know or trust the background of hired security personnel or how they might be perceived by others in your research area.
- Do not drive at night, and only take public transport at night, if the journey is absolutely necessary and after having examined the risks in advance. As noted, vehicle accidents often pose the greatest risk to travellers' health, and a great many of those accidents occur at night due to lack of headlights, poor roads, unsafe drivers, etc.
- Try to anticipate the quality of the transport and the driver, and if you feel unsafe, consider leaving and waiting for another ride. Trust your instinct; delayed or cancelled research is always better than compromised safety.
- If hiring a car and a driver, ensure that maintenance is carried out regularly. Inspect vehicles in person prior to payment.
- Ensure that the driver drives safely, at a suitable speed for the road conditions and respects any legal speed limits.
- Motorcycles: regardless of local law, wear boots/shoes and a helmet when travelling by motorbike.
- Talk to the host organisation and other contacts, to ascertain the appropriate behaviour in case of particular threats (e.g. car accident, breakdown, checkpoints, or car-jacking). Ensure that all those travelling in the vehicle know what course of action to take in an emergency.
- Be aware that sometimes additional approval is needed to travel outside of towns, to IDP or refugee camps, or other sensitive destinations; be informed about this, and follow regulations.

Authorities / documents

As a general rule, it is important to introduce yourself and your project to local authorities. Co-ordinate with key contacts about whom to approach, when and how to approach them and what to say and what not to say. Ensure that you have the requisite documentation in the appropriate language, and that this is kept valid and up-to-date.

It is advisable to organise triple access to your key documents, such as passport, ticket and driving license. One set of key documents must be within your reach in a safe place (such as a 'money belt' worn on your body). A second set can be available digitally, either on your mobile phone, computer, *in the cloud* or in an email. A third copy of them can be held by third parties, such as embassies, host organisations or persons of trust in the country you are visiting.

If your research is performed abroad, inform your Embassy or other diplomatic representation about your presence in the country. They can instruct you about safety protocols and include you in the list of people to be warned or evacuated in case of emergency. The Embassy may ask you for an itinerary when you go to risky areas. They can also help you access other networks and information in country. Many Embassies provide regular security briefings/information to those that are registered with them. In many cases you can register online in advance. In other cases, it may be more appropriate to register in person on arrival. EU citizens can register with another EU embassy if their own country does not have representation.

Note however, that you cannot expect assistance with the research, your lodging or logistics from your embassy. Be considerate and bear this in mind when you approach them. Be aware that some embassies are highly risk-averse and may automatically advise against travel or activities that you have good reason – having done solid risk assessment – to believe is safe enough to meet your own standards.

Culturally sensitive behaviour

Ensure that your appearance and behaviour is appropriate to the context. Everywhere in the world, people get an idea about a visitor based upon appearance. Being a researcher means that you are dependent on your appearance for access to information. There is no single correct way of dressing or behaving for a researcher. Visiting authorities may require dressing up, but visiting a village dressed in business clothing may create distrust. In (post)conflict settings, be aware of the possible military association of clothing such as heavy boots and camouflage fatigues (in some countries these are even forbidden). Be prepared to change your style, dress and behaviour to fit the environment in a way that you might not consider necessary in your home country.

Other behaviour is equally important to consider. In some places it may be frowned upon for women (or men) to be seen consuming alcohol, engaging in romantic flirtation (even 'off the clock'), even speaking loudly. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) researchers must think about how your actual and perceived identity and/or sexuality may be locally unacceptable or even illegal, and then assess how this might affect risk and how to minimise this risk.

Accommodation

Whilst in the field, you will need to find secure accommodation for yourself, and perhaps for research assistants, drivers, other team members as well. Speak to the host organisation, NGOs and other contacts in advance to find out the available options. Ensure that your per-diem/allowance is sufficient to cover suitably safe accommodation, and know in advance how you will need to pay for such accommodation (e.g. local currency, U.S. dollars, etc.). Make sure that you have strategies in place to carry as much money as you need without attracting attention or leaving it easily accessible. This can be particularly challenging where accommodation might be a bit costly but currency is only available in small bills.

When travelling around, you may also need to seek temporary accommodation in hotels or guesthouses. Again consider in advance the different options, and select the best one for your security. A list of key considerations regarding accommodation is included in section 3.

Communications

Good communication is crucial to maximise your level of safety. However, in disaster-affected or remote areas it is not always easy to have efficient and reliable communication. It is therefore important to be aware, and to inform others, that communication technologies, even today, cannot always be relied upon.

Communication in the field is essential in different ways and for different reasons. In most places it is possible to buy prepaid SIM cards for mobile phones. In order to stay informed and to know what is happening in case of emergency, it is recommended to have a portable radio, with extra batteries, and to be aware of which radio stations are known to report and transmitting in such circumstances. In some places you can even find stations reporting in more than one language. It is a good idea to ask local partners which are the best options.

In high-risk areas it may be essential to know how to use a two-way radio and to have at least a basic level of radio communication jargon. Knowing how to use a satellite phone can also be helpful. Always have a card with emergency contact numbers to hand. This should include all national and local phone codes (essential for satellite communications). This emergency contact card can be vital and should carry your own name, to allow people to identify you when you are not able to communicate due to injury or other disabling events. Also consider carrying a GPS device, as described in chapter 2.

Communication with people in places where we do not speak the local language can be highly challenging. Using interpreters can bring about additional risks. In social sciences, words and what they express are the basis of research, and having a competent and trustworthy translator is vital. Interpreters get to know a lot of information, so it is important to establish trust and mechanisms that will safeguard the confidentiality of the data collected. Be sure to involve the host organisation or key stakeholders in the selection of the interpreter, and allow sufficient time for quality training in your research goals and methods before the research begins. Also remember that learning even a few words of the local language, such as basic courtesies (e.g. 'thank you', 'my name is...', etc.) can go a long way toward building trust and rapport.

Health

Travelling to hazardous areas may require special preparation and precautions. In some emergency situations, like in refugee camps, health services may be more readily available than in surrounding areas due to the presence of aid organisations, but you may also encounter situations where medical services are absent and once-eradicated diseases have recurred. Understand the basic methods of prevention and consider undergoing basic first aid training, particularly geared toward remote or 'backcountry' travel.

Remember to carry with you any regular medication you may need. Before your trip, identify trustworthy medical facilities in, or near to, the site of research, as well as along the route. If there is a local or national emergency service, make sure you have the contact details. Always carry with you a card identifying your blood type, allergies, medications, vaccination card, insurance and emergency contact numbers and contact details for your next of kin. When traveling with others, make sure that others know where to access this information if you are incapacitated, and that you know the same for them.

Ensure adequate health preparations have been taken, including vaccination, personal hygiene and malarial prophylaxis, if applicable. If there are any health or dental concerns, get these checked out before you go to the field. Get information as to prevalent diseases, prevention measures and symptoms. If you do experience any of these symptoms in the field or on return, get them checked out immediately.

Although in most places, sufficient quantities of food are available for those who can afford it, fresh vegetables and fruits may not be readily available in some areas. If you have special dietary needs, think about how you will maintain these, or indeed if it is possible to do so. Likewise, where you have to rely on motorised transport, you are bound to miss your usual exercise. Remember that being in good condition is vital in your capacity to cope with stress and health threats in the field. Balanced food and regular exercise are important success factors for fieldwork. Be reasonably cautious – it is more important to maintain your health and capacity to carry out your work than it is to join the locals at an eatery of dubious food safety (you can always order a soft drink to be sociable while others eat!). Consider carrying non-perishable snacks.

Make sure you are up to date on local health and disease hazards and aware of the necessary precautions and protocols. HIV/AIDS is a taboo in many places, and people may be unaware of carrying the disease. Be aware of other sources of infection besides sexual transmission, including blood transfusions or manicures. Ebola, Zika, Lyme, and other diseases are increasingly the focus of public health and travel-related concern and media attention. Do not panic; many people live and travel safely in areas of heightened disease risk every day without ever being infected. Do be informed and take evidence-based precautions.

Stress management and wellbeing

Fieldwork and stress

Stress is a normal part of life. The problem arises when there is a gap between the demands we face and our ability to meet them. It is important to manage stress effectively as, if not properly managed, stress can cause physical and mental health problems. Stress can also impair our judgement and increase risk. The personal experience of living under difficult circumstances or in a stressful environment should not be underestimated. The impact of this can be intense, especially when added on to the 'normal' culture shock experienced in a different environment. It is important to take regular breaks. Stress can both result in over-identification ('Am I the only one who cares?') and over-distancing ('It is their own fault') and may lead to biased observations and/or unacceptable behaviour. Precautions against stress are thus both for your own sake and for the sake of the research and the research environment.

Our stress tolerance and our resilience are affected by our personality traits, coping skills, level of health and fitness, our previous experiences and backgrounds, and our own perceptions. This means stress can affect us all at different points and in different ways. Researchers will experience stress differently, and therefore need to find coping mechanisms to build and maintain resilience and ways of managing stress that will work for them. Exercise, yoga, meditation, journaling, reading fiction, playing music – all of these are proven methods of stress reduction that may be critical to the success of your research.

The best way to deal with stress is to prevent it and recognise it in time. To do this, it is necessary to know the way it usually manifests itself in oneself and in colleagues and friends. Stress during fieldwork does not always happen in the field, sometimes it manifests itself beforehand (associated with the preparation, uncertainties, fears or anxiety) or sometimes later, once back from the field, sometimes several weeks or months later. Stress symptoms should never be ignored. On the contrary, they should be considered as normal and not seen as a sign of weakness or lack of preparation.

Post-fieldwork stress and reverse culture shock

Coming back home you might find yourself changed and affected by your research experiences. The term 'reversed culture shock' is sometimes used to address the process of re-adaptation. Especially when returning from hazardous areas, this reverse culture shock may be accompanied with the memories and experiences of extreme events and the psychological consequences of experiencing hazards and disasters, even if it is only in the narratives of people/respondents. Many people experience a form of stress when returning home. This post-fieldwork stress is very normal but can become problematic if neglected. Plan a period of relaxation when returning from the field and take symptoms of post-fieldwork stress seriously and act when they become problematic. They are not unusual. A long period in a different situation – in anthropology the 'liminal phase' of the *rite de passage* – unleashes unforeseen emotions and behaviour; that is a normal human reaction.

Traumatic stress

Traumatic stress can arise if we experience a sudden, unexpected or violent event that totally overwhelms our normal view of the world. Reactions to traumatic events will vary from individual to individual. If you are involved in this type of event find someone you can talk to about it. Ensure that you eat and sleep and follow as normal a routine as possible directly following the event. Seek professional counselling or support if you need it. Remember that your supervisors and colleagues may/will have experience in these matters, and do not hesitate to share these feelings with someone you trust. If you experience symptoms of traumatic stress weeks, months or even years after the event, it is vital to get professional support.

Increasingly, research institutes or universities offer in-house health services, including counselling. Do not hesitate to seek these services or other specialised support, whatever you feel is best equipped to help you with your specific experience.



3 Security guidelines, checklists and key considerations

3. Security guidelines, checklists and key considerations

This section of the manual is designed to provide researchers with further guidelines to assist in planning their security provision. As well as providing checklists for some of the areas outlined in the earlier sections of the manual, this section also gives some guidance on possible risk reduction measures pertaining to a range of threats. It is suggested that researchers use this section to create their own security arrangements during their field research. Some sections are more relevant for expatriate researchers, than for researchers or research organisations operating within their own country.

Checklist for a security aware research proposal

- The proposal must consider and address ethical issues that can be anticipated in the research area.
- The proposal should contain a risk assessment.
- The proposal should contain information about the researcher's insurance and its coverage
- The proposal should contain some safety precautions and alternative plans to reduce the assessed risk.
- The proposal should detail the organisations involved in the research and fieldwork development.
- Research proposals need to contain a realistic budget. Research in hazardous areas is often costly: public transport may not be working effectively, house rents shoot up in areas with a high presence of aid workers and peace-keepers, and food items may be very costly. Prices may fluctuate. Plan accordingly.
- Discuss security with people who have recent experience in the research area. Find information from different sources about the security situation in the area.
- Prepare alternative options in case your fieldwork cannot take place due to security considerations.
- Plan in advance how to store and safeguard your data (notebooks, flash drives, CD-roms, documents etc.) to prevent possible misuse of sensitive information by third parties. Send backups out of the country, mail them to a separate e-mail account, or create space 'in the cloud', to prevent loss. Use code names or numbers for respondents to ensure their privacy in case your data is confiscated. Keep lists of actual names separate so that chance of passing along identifying information is minimised.

Checklist for selection of a host organisation and relationship building

- In case you work with a host organisation in the country, other than your own research institute, selection and maintenance of this relationship is vital both for the research and your security. The place and role of the organisation in the local context and in relation to political tension must be taken into account in choosing the kind of organisation with which you will work. Select your host organisation carefully.

- Take time to get to know the host and to coordinate with him/her about the research you are going to do. This process needs to start before you leave for the field. It is usually appreciated if you bring a gift for the persons who have made arrangements for you. Many organisations in (post-) disaster areas have a security protocol and/or a Code of Conduct that you must take into account. Ask about this before your departure, and look at this documentation as part of your pre-departure context and risk analysis.
- Make clear agreements in the first week about roles and responsibilities in case of emergency. Your evacuation and shelter is part of the responsibility of the host organisation (for instance access to a UN plane). Also, use your time to talk with your host and other informants about possible sensitive issues and actors with which/whom you may have to deal. Your host may be able to assist and give advice on many basic security issues in relation to housing, transportation, carrying money, and data-storage.
- Understand the host organisations core activities and how these are perceived in the local context.
- Understand the relationships your host organisation has and maintains
- Remember your actions could affect the relationships your host organisation has carefully built. Take advice.
- Introduce yourself and build a rapport with, local authorities, community leaders and key-actors. Always do this in consultation with, and take advice from, the host organization.
- Be aware of how your interactions can be perceived by others.
- Attempt to learn the local language and practice it where possible.
- Be considerate/sensitive in discussing political, religious or other potentially contentious topics with those you do not know well.
- Try not to raise expectations or make promises you cannot guarantee to meet.
- Show respect for local beliefs, customs and cultural practices but do not 'go native'.
- Find out about local law and abide by it.

Checklist when conducting a context analysis

In many cases, the following information will be part of the research orientation and proposal. But in case it is not, consider the topics below:

History and dynamics

- How is the population distributed within the country/region? Including ethnic, tribal and social distinctions. What are gender roles?
- Social context: Is there structural violence (e.g. systematic discrimination against a particular group of people)? Is there civil unrest or internal fighting between factions, or ethnic groups?
- Political situation: Who is in power? Is there an established elite? What is their relationship with the rest of the population? What are the roles of the police and the army?
- How do different groups within the context relate to each other? Consider (potential) changes in these relationships, and how these can impact the research.
- The nature of the parties in past and present conflict, their strategies, methods, the social contract between armed groups and the civilian population, and resource base and 'war economy' aspects to any conflict.

- The relationship between central government, local authorities, civil society, and business groups.
- The stability of governments (national and local) and civil infrastructure
- External players: Regional and international
- Other key actors in the conflict
- Reasons for conflict
- History of atrocities

Crime

- Nature of common crimes
- By whom is it perpetrated, how and why?
- Who are the primary targets?
- Economic situation of the country and how it impacts crime.

Natural environment

- The geography of the country
- Climate
- Proneness to natural disasters
- Common diseases

Infrastructure

- Health infrastructure and emergency care
- Communications
- Travel and transport
- Banking infrastructure
- Legal system
- Housing

Key fieldwork considerations

This checklist is meant for all researchers, particularly those that work in hazardous or remote areas. Some considerations are perhaps more appropriate for expatriate researchers, yet all researchers are encouraged to consider their relevance for their specific research experience. For example, national researchers may work with a host organisation when they do applied research or when they are working in a different part of their own country.

Before departure

- Discuss your trip with those it concerns. This may be other researchers and assistants, but it also includes family and friends: Going to an environment that is considered dangerous creates worries and insecurity for people at home. Prepare those at home for your departure, and think about who will manage your affairs for you, especially if you are in a remote location with sporadic communications.
- Inquire in advance about availability of internet and telephone network in your area of research in order to keep expectations realistic about the possibilities of communicating home. Determine whether you will bring your mobile phone to the field (local prepaid SIM cards are inexpensive and easy to obtain in many areas) or purchase a phone locally (which may be advisable in insecure areas or if your phone is especially valuable).
- Provide your contact persons with the necessary contact details and information

about your trip before you leave.

- Confirm a key contact in case of emergency. Ensure that this person has the contact details of your family, coordinator or supervisor and your host organisation and vice versa.
- Ensure you have obtained the correct visas and research permits for your stay. These issues can be tedious and costly – make sure to start this process early. Discuss this with the host organisation. In some countries, obtaining a research visa is complicated while doing research on a tourist visa may be tolerated.
- Obtain letters of invitation/authorisation, as necessary for visas and other purposes. In some locations, the more official-looking documents you carry (from government, your university, local partners, etc.), the more seriously you will be taken by local officials.
- If you intend to drive, ensure to have an international driver's license.
- Register with the Embassy of your home country – check your country's travel recommendations to determine the process, as some (such as the United States) require pre-registration in an online system, while others will ask you to report to the Embassy to check in upon your arrival at your destination.
- Make photocopies of valuable documents such as passport, airline tickets and driving license. Email scans of documents to yourself and keep them on an accessible thumb drive so you have access to them whenever you need. Also email copies to key contacts.
- Arrange/plan for airport transfers and initial accommodation in country. It is also a good idea to have contingency plans in place in case these are suddenly unavailable upon arrival.
- Inquire about the possibilities of cash dispensers (ATMs) in your country of research, as well as coverage for credit card usage. In case there is none, inquire in time about the best way of bringing money and keeping it safe in country. Always keep some contingency cash in USD.
- Review and follow the 'Key Health Considerations' below.

Upon arrival

- Know that many safety and security incidents happen near the beginning and end of trips, when you are most unfamiliar with your surroundings, or when you have become so familiar that you let your guard down and stop taking certain precautions.
- Make sure you have made arrangements for collection on arrival, or that you have a clear plan as to how to travel to your destination safely and make contact with the host organisation. Think about the time of day you will be landing at the airport. Will there be onward transport at this time? If using taxis, find out in advance which company is safest to travel with.
- When you arrive at the host organisation, ask for a security briefing. If you are tired from travelling, ask for any essential information you need before resting, but leave the full briefing until you are able to comprehend everything and ask relevant questions. Orient yourself – if possible get a guided tour of the local area from your host. Familiarise yourself with any key locations/contacts.
- Ensure that you have memorised at least one emergency contact number. Other key contacts should be programmed into your phone AND carried on paper in case phone is lost/unusable.

Key health considerations

Wellbeing and health checklist

- Take an up-to-date first aid kit including basic medicines.
- Medicines, condoms, tampons, sun block and other relevant items may not be available in every place or every country. Take supplies with you.
- Know your glasses/contact lens prescription and take a spare pair.
- Have a medical and dental check-up before you leave.
- Ensure you are up to date with vaccinations and prophylaxis. Check the availability in country of certain critical medications such as rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, which even private health facilities in capital cities may not keep in stock.
- If you expect to go to areas with limited food availability, bring supplies of supplemental vitamins.
- Bring a generous medical kit. You will be bound to give away some items, but be sure never to give away your basic supplies.
- Attend a basic first aid course prior to departure, if you can.
- Try to prepare for and anticipate social, emotional and psychological reactions you might experience.
- Think about how you will manage stress, and access coping mechanisms in the field.
- Take the time to adjust to a different time-zone, climate, and eating or living habits. It is normal to experience minor inconveniences, including stomach and sleeping problems, in the first weeks of fieldwork.
- If working in severe heat or extreme cold, remember the right kind of clothing and equipment can significantly reduce health problems.

Insurance checklist

- Before you travel ensure that you have adequate and appropriate insurance coverage for your trip.
- Check the conditions and coverage of your insurance.
- Check the amounts compensated in case of invalidity or mortality and take a more expensive package if your current package is deemed to have too little coverage.
- Some companies cover vaccinations and malaria prophylaxis, which may save you a lot of money.
- Understand how your insurance policy works. For some claims to be valid, certain documentation (such as police reports) is required. It may also matter at what point in time you report an incident.
- Leave copies of your insurance documentation with a key contact.

Key threats and risk reduction considerations

This section contains information on some of the key threats you could encounter in the field. This guide needs to be adapted to the local context. Note that most of these are extreme cases, far less likely to occur during your fieldwork experience than common illness, injury, etc – and that the latter can be almost as destructive to your health, safety and productivity if you are ill-prepared for their occurrence and stuck in remote areas. However, although extreme and unlikely to occur, coping with extreme events does require special attention and awareness.

It is important that you familiarize yourself with this section *prior* to traveling to any situation in which you might need to call on the advice herein, and review this advice regularly whilst you are in the field.

Location and access

- Avoid locations close to military bases or other potential targets (and don't take photographs of these)
- Be familiar with routes from your accommodation to other key locations (host organisation, other contacts, hospitals etc.), and potential areas of unrest.
- Levels of crime in the area.
- Check if the area, hotel, property, owner is affiliated with a particular group, and how this affects risk.
- How is your accommodation situated with regards to security, access, evacuation?
- Are there shared entrances/facilities? Who are you sharing with? Who are your neighbours?
- Bring padlocks. Also, bring a rubber doorstep/door wedge for added safety, when inside your room. In many cases locks do work properly

For hotels/guesthouses

- Does the hotel have a gate, security guards, other protections? How does this affect the image of the hotel and its guests in the community (i.e. potentially increase visibility, vulnerability)?
- How reliable is the power? Is there an alternative power supply (i.e. generator)?
- Ensure doors and windows can be securely locked.
- If possible, take a room on the first or second floor. The ground floor is more vulnerable to opportunistic theft, whilst the higher levels can increase vulnerability in event of a fire or earthquake.
- Beware of individuals posing as police or security officers who want you to accompany them to another location. Obtain proper identification and call the local police to verify. Ask the hotel desk to assist you in verifying identities.
- If someone knocks at your door, do not assume the person is who s/he claims to be – call the desk to double-check.
- Do not enter your room if you find the door open or unlocked. If this happens, return to the desk and ask someone to accompany you to your room.
- Do not display your room key to strangers, or leave it on your table whilst eating.
- Are your passport, money, laptop and other valuable materials secured? If you doubt the security of your room, it may be useful to keep them in a safe at the reception desk.
- Particularly if you are staying in a hotel or guesthouse for more than a few days, it may enhance your experience both socially and in terms of security to get to know the hotel staff, be able to greet them by name, and generally be friendly. At the risk of suggesting 'instrumental friendliness,' the fact is that most people are more likely to reciprocate kindness and look out for those who treat us well.

Criminality

Conflict situations are often high in criminal activity, inflicted by parties in the conflict and people profiting from the chaos (Van Brabant 2010). In post-conflict situations, criminal activity often rises. When military presence recedes, weaponry remains available and former fighters return home without employment. As part of the context analysis and risk assessment, you should assess what are the main criminal threats within the environment where you will be visiting/working, and take appropriate measures to reduce the risk.

Key points to consider

- Respect local advice on no-go areas, hours and types of transport to use or avoid and other measures to reduce risk of falling prey to criminal behaviour.
- Know where previous incidents have happened and avoid areas where there is an increased risk of crime.
- Never resist violent robbery, and be aware that robbers often use violence because they are nervous. Try to co-operate without showing fear or anger.
- No material goods, no matter how seemingly irreplaceable, are worth being killed or injured for.
- Be careful who has access to your personal information. Do not give out business cards too freely, and avoid identification on luggage, keys etc.
- Do not be too predictable/have visibly fixed routines, as these can increase vulnerability.
- Have emergency contact numbers available, both programmed into your phone and separately in case your phone is stolen.
- If you do notice any suspicious behaviour, discuss this with your host organisation.

Car-jacking

A car-jack is the attempt to steal a car and its contents. This threat may be prevalent in both urban and rural environments in which security is poor. Reduce the risk of this happening by:

- Being aware of which types of cars are more likely to be a target for car-jackers. Especially in urban environments, car-jackings are often carried out by criminal gangs, who are looking for mid- to high-value cars that are not too distinctive, but have a good resale price.
- Avoiding travel on roads where incidents have been recently reported.
- Avoiding driving alone, or at night.
- Keep doors and windows locked.

If a car-jacking succeeds and the car-jackers demand the vehicle or other property, cooperate calmly without making sudden movements, that might be misinterpreted. Do not take the keys out of the ignition unless you are instructed to do so. Get out when instructed to do so. Hand over anything that is requested – remember that no property is worth risking your life. When the car-jackers have left, get yourself to safety as quickly as possible and report the incident.

Hostility (crowds/mobs/riots/demonstrations)

Be considerate of large crowds that could have the potential to turn violent. As well as being aware when public demonstrations are planned, also know when local holidays and celebrations will occur as these can often be trigger points. Do not take photographs, as this may incite anger towards you, unless you have explicitly been given consent.

If confronted with rising tension – crowds, mob violence, riots, protests, demonstrations, looting and so forth – it is advised to:

- Get yourself to safety as soon as possible
- Remain alert to the changing situation
- Reduce movements/visibility and if in a vehicle when confronted, do not get out, lock doors, close windows and drive carefully away
- Do not become angry, or at least, do not show the anger
- Communicate with other organisations

Sexual aggression

Sexual violence remains commonplace everywhere in the world, though the risks may vary according to circumstance. The key message as a potential victim or witness to this or any crime is to *protect and preserve life*, and this can be helped by being prepared. Sexual aggression can affect both men and women. Sexual aggression can also have consequences for witnesses, families, colleagues who can be affected as a result. Sexual violence constitutes an extremely serious threat, one which – due to cultural differences and under-reporting – can be difficult to accurately assess during a risk assessment.

Researchers should inform themselves about risks of sexual violence and sexual harassment in their location as much as possible. Familiarize yourself with places and hours to avoid, and inquire about norms regarding traveling alone. When you discuss these risks, take into account that aggression can be targeted. Certain categories of people may be more vulnerable to sexual aggression, for political or cultural reasons, due to perceptions of their behaviour or identity or due to their perceived membership of/links with certain groups. Knowing this may allow you to mitigate risk by adapting behaviour.

Immediate response

There is no golden rule as to the best way to respond when threatened with sexual aggression. Use your best judgement based on the specifics of the incident and on your own self-knowledge.

There are 3 common ways in which people react, no one is more 'right' than the other, and some people will try several combinations within the one incident:

1. Being Submissive: Ignoring and getting away from sexual harassment. Sexual Violence: getting through it – surviving;
2. Passive resistance: Talking to the assailant – reasoning, or making yourself seen as a person rather than an object;
3. Being Active: Fighting back – screaming; vehicle horn; shouting; running away; hitting out.

To try to reduce risk

- Adopt a conservative personal appearance and manner in keeping with local societal and cultural norms.
- Where possible, avoid being alone in high risk areas, travel with others, and take accommodation with trusted organisations and take care when selecting accommodation.
- Consider investing in devices such as whistles that can be used to attract attention.
- Be aware of local myths and perceptions that could affect vulnerability, such as, for example, notions about sexual availability of foreigners or city girls.
- If someone is making unwanted advances, calmly state your boundaries at an early stage (e.g. 'Please do not hug me'). If you do not feel able to do this, can someone intercede on your behalf? Try to get yourself to safety as quickly as possible.
- Include responding to sexual violence part of your contingency plan. Think about issues around confidentiality, reporting, medical care, legal proceedings and psychological support.

Corruption and bribes

Researchers should avoid engaging in corruption and giving or receiving bribes. Reasons to avoid any kind of corruption include:

- It is usually against the law and therefore poses a security risk.
- Perceptions of corruption could be extremely damaging to the reputation of your host organisation, home institution and the credibility of your research.
- We must be fair, equitable and transparent about those with whom we are able to engage.
- When one individual or organization starts paying bribes, this can then expose other organisations or individuals to being pressured or threatened for money or resources.

If you are threatened with violence, then this is no longer a request for a bribe, but it is extortion and theft and needs to be treated as such. In that case, comply, bring yourself to safety, and discuss the event with hosts or colleagues and consider to report to the authorities.

In some settings, there may be the grey area of 'facilitation costs'. This is where it has become established practice to pay non-official fees for assistance, or to pay local officials for meeting attendance, transportation costs, etc (also keep in mind that, in some cases, they may not be receiving any other remuneration for their work). It is best to take advice from the host organisation and others as to the best way to understand and deal with these costs. Where appropriate, you may need to budget for them.

Arrest or detention

Arrest and detention are two related threats to which that researchers may be vulnerable, depending on the country of work and the nature of the research project. The risk of both can be reduced by a good contextual knowledge, good research practice, transparency, integrity and respectful attitudes.

How to avoid arrest and detention

- Avoid being in high-risk areas.
- Attempt to maintain good relations with local authorities and communities.
- Ensure that all legal documentation is correct and carry this with you at all times.
- Be aware when activities may cause potential friction.
- Take care when taking photographs. Gain consent from any subjects, and avoid photographing sensitive objects, people, and situations, including any government buildings or personnel. Military actors, buildings and equipment are particularly challenging unless otherwise known. Be cautious about inquiring openly about and reporting on human rights' incidents and abuses, especially if perpetrated by the military, police or groups they support.
- Display appropriate conduct at checkpoints, and do not challenge security, police and army personnel unnecessarily.

If arrested/detained

- Ensure that someone external is aware of the situation as quickly as possible to report to embassy/commission, ICRC or UN as appropriate
- If possible, retain a communications device.
- Behave with respect and courtesy.
- Request essentials that you need.

- Elicit information as to the reason for the arrest/detention.
- Obtain the assistance of a lawyer, if necessary.

Abduction/kidnapping

Kidnappers usually choose their targets after careful surveillance, and prefer targets with visible assets or a clear affiliation with a certain target country or organisation. Do not be too predictable in your routines/regular activities, and be alert for signs of surveillance. Do not publicise your movements too widely.

Researchers are unlikely to be a primary target for a planned kidnapping. However, where research is planned in areas where kidnapping of tourists or aid workers has recently occurred, (a) assess whether the research should go ahead, or (b) take additional precautions and advice about how to ensure safe travel in the area. Consider carrying a GPS tracking device, if you will be in a high-risk environment. In kidnapping situations, someone knowing your whereabouts can save your life.

If you are abducted

- At the time of abduction, do not attempt to fight back or escape. (Unless you are sure you have a viable escape option). An attempted escape or resistance will increase your vulnerability. Most kidnaps have an economic motive and can be successfully resolved.
- The time during and soon after the abduction is the most dangerous as the kidnappers are likely to be nervous. Be cooperative and non-aggressive. Do not make any sudden movements.
- Remain as calm as possible, and follow instructions and speak only if the kidnappers asks you questions.

In captivity

- Encourage your captors to let the authorities know your condition and whereabouts.
- Take care of yourself and try to keep to a daily routine: exercise, wash, sleep when possible, and eat and drink what is offered, even if you are not hungry.
- Ask politely for what you need, such as food, water, medicine, soap, use of the toilet, books etc.
- Do not threaten or verbally abuse your kidnappers, and avoid appearing to study them too closely.
- Be a good listener. Do not argue. Be polite. Try to gain your captors' respect and try to build rapport with them by talking about 'safe' topics (e.g. family, sport).
- Be patient and mentally prepared for a long captivity – perhaps months.
- Stay mentally active: read, write, use your memory, try to keep track of time.
- Do not believe everything that you are told.

Rescue/release

- Follow exact instructions. Do not make sudden movements. Stay alert.
- If there is a rescue attempt, drop to the floor and put your hands over your head.
- State who you are and that you are a hostage.
- Avoid corners, as these are key areas the rescuers will be looking to clear.
- Never run towards your rescuers (they may mistake you for a dangerous kidnapper!).

Landmines, IEDs & unexploded ordnance (UXO)

Landmines are explosive devices that are detonated by contact with, or proximity to, a person or vehicle. They are designed to incapacitate a person or a vehicle. In former war zones, landmines are an issue of concern. An improvised explosive device (IED) can be made from almost anything, and may be set in a static location, placed on a vehicle, or carried by an individual (suicide bomber). Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) is the shells/mortars and bombs that did not explode on impact. An area that has experienced fighting, even many years or decades previously, may be contaminated. Seek the advice of the host organisation and local informants can advise you as to the local risks and mine markings.

Key points

- Avoid mined areas and always obey mine markings, even if locals tell you that the area has been cleared.
- Ensure that someone knows your travel plans, and that you call in on arrival. If you need to deviate from the planned route, let them know.
- If possible, stay on hard-surfaced roads, and do not leave the road.
- Do not drive over anything on the road. In risky areas, do not touch unusual objects by the road, which may be IEDs.
- Use extra caution when travelling after heavy rain/flooding, as such events can move or expose mines.
- Avoid overgrown areas, stick to the well-travelled path.
- Where there is one mine, there are usually more. If you find yourself in a minefield stop immediately, call for help and remain as still as possible.
- In the case of a mine accident in front of you, stop immediately. If in a vehicle do not get out of your car. You may also be in the minefield. If you are on foot, do not rush to assist any injured people, stay where you are and try to direct them to self-treat. Summon expert assistance.
- Do not be in the first vehicles on the road in the morning.

Shooting/crossfire

If you hear shooting, keep calm. How you react should depend on how far away the shooting is taking place and on the behaviour of the local people, who may have more experience of this kind of situation. In most cases, if you are not sure of the direction and where the shooting was, act preventively and throw yourself to the ground. Lie face down as flat as possible. From that position assess the options to move and take cover/conceal yourself based on locals' behaviour, if you are not in immediate danger. Do not be ashamed to overreact; when in doubt, protect yourself.

Know where it will be safe to take cover from small arms fire. Remember that there are two types of cover. Hard cover will both physically protect you from bullets and hide you visually. Soft cover will hide you visually from those trying to cause harm, making it harder for them to hit you. Soft cover is more appropriate when moving out of an area rather than for permanent cover used to wait out an attack. Decide if it is possible and safer to move away from the area, or whether to wait for the shooting to cease. Make sure the firing has stopped for some time before leaving your cover.

Cars provide limited cover but can be useful as soft cover when moving out of a crossfire zone. The best cover is provided by the engine block, so this should be between you and the line of fire. However, cars will not stop larger calibre bullets, will often attract fire and contain potentially dangerous substances – glass, fuel, and battery acid.

Buildings provide a lot of cover. However, remember that bullets can penetrate single skinned walls so always avoid rooms with only one wall between you and the threat. The safest areas in buildings are stair wells, doorways (away from the threat), corridors and where two walls meet at a 90-degree angle i.e. the corners of rooms.

The fuse on a grenade can mean you have anywhere between 2 and 10 seconds before an explosion. Therefore, you must react instantly: take one step away from the device; dive away from the device to the ground.

Natural hazards

If you are working in an area that is prone to natural hazards, such as earthquake, tsunami, volcanoes, flooding, or other natural disasters, you should take appropriate precautions. Consult specialist expertise, which may be available locally. Issues to consider may include, but are not limited to:

- Finding an earthquake/flood resistant building to live/work in (this may be difficult or impossible in some circumstances).
- Being prepared for the types of natural hazards that are prevalent in your area, through (for example) some of the following precautions: Secure equipment so it does not fall on people, fix filing cabinets and bookcases to walls; Anchor and brace gas and fuel tanks; Restrain desktop computers and other appliances; Stock emergency food and water.
- Not trying to drive over a flooded road, even if you think it is shallow enough to cross. If your car stalls, abandon it immediately. Attempting to move a stalled vehicle in flood conditions can be fatal.
- Not walking through moving water. Only a few inches of moving water can make you fall. If you must walk in water, walk where the water is not moving. Use a stick to check the firmness of the ground in front of you.
- Being familiar with your building – make sure you would be able to find your way around it in the dark.
- Knowing your escape routes and alternatives – where to head will also depend on the type of disaster to which you are responding.
- In case of sudden disaster risk, have material pre-prepared for evacuation and hibernation.
- Always having access to radios or other means of communication so you can obtain advice about any possible risk.

Evacuation

In case of a deteriorating security situation, take advice from key contacts and experts. Stubbornness, toughness or carelessness about risks jeopardizes your and other people's safety (think the frog-in-boiling-water-syndrome).

It is wise to have an evacuation plan in advance. How would you rapidly leave the area if you needed to for whatever reason (this could be due to conflict, breakdown of law and order, natural disaster, targeted threat or due to disease or other health reasons)? If you will rely on others for this plan (as is likely), consult with them in advance.

In some situations, it may not be possible to leave safely. In this case, you need a hibernation plan. Your hibernation plan should equip you to keep a low profile in a safe location for a minimum of a week.



4. Conducting a 3 step risk and hazard assessment

The 3 steps outlined below explain how to conduct a simple and effective risk assessment.

1. Threat assessment

A threat is any event that may result in personal harm or injury or cause loss/damage to property/assets. The first step is to list all dangers and threats that one can forecast (regardless of how likely or not they are to occur), based on the previous study of the context, history, environment and current situation of the place to which you will travel. This can include:

- Threats to the person (harassment, physical or sexual assault, kidnapping, illness etc.);
- Threats to property (theft, looting, burglary, vandalism, arson etc.);
- Threats directed against property, but which may harm people (natural hazards, shelling, car-jacking etc.).

Some threats may be specifically targeted at particular individuals or organisations, whilst others will occur within the environment and researchers may be vulnerable simply due to 'being in the wrong place at the wrong time'. As you will (or should) be doing a thorough context assessment in formulating your research plan, you should use the knowledge gained from that assessment to also get an idea of the threats that exist.

2. Vulnerability analysis

The second step is to perform a vulnerability analysis, which is to assess the likelihood of each threat occurring and the impact or effect that the possible occurrence would have. The function of this vulnerability analysis is to help to identify the most significant threats – those that pose the most significant risk to you and the research. Consider for each of the threats where and how you might be at risk.

It can be helpful to consider your vulnerability in terms of *Likelihood of occurrence and Impact or Consequences*.

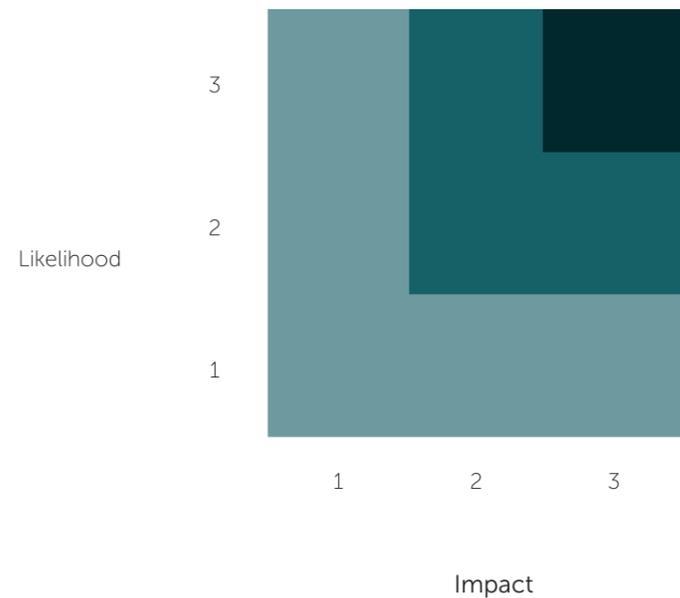
Factors that may affect Likelihood

- Level of exposure
- Types of research being undertaken
- Location of research
- Value of property
- Perceptions within the local context.

Factors that may affect Impact

- Security provisions made prior to incident
- Reactions to incident (contingency plans)
- Ability to respond
- Contacts and networks to support/assist

To conduct this analysis, it may be useful to rank from 1 to 3 each threat in terms of its likelihood and Impact or Consequences, 1 being the lowest level of probability of occurrence and lowest level of impact on the research or our safety. Then, multiply the value obtained in each factor to obtain a total score. The following Risk-Vulnerability Matrix can serve as an example:



Total Score descriptor

- 1 to 3 = Low Risk (L)
- 4 to 6 = Medium Risk (M)
- 7 to 9 = High Risk (H)

3. Identify risk reduction measures

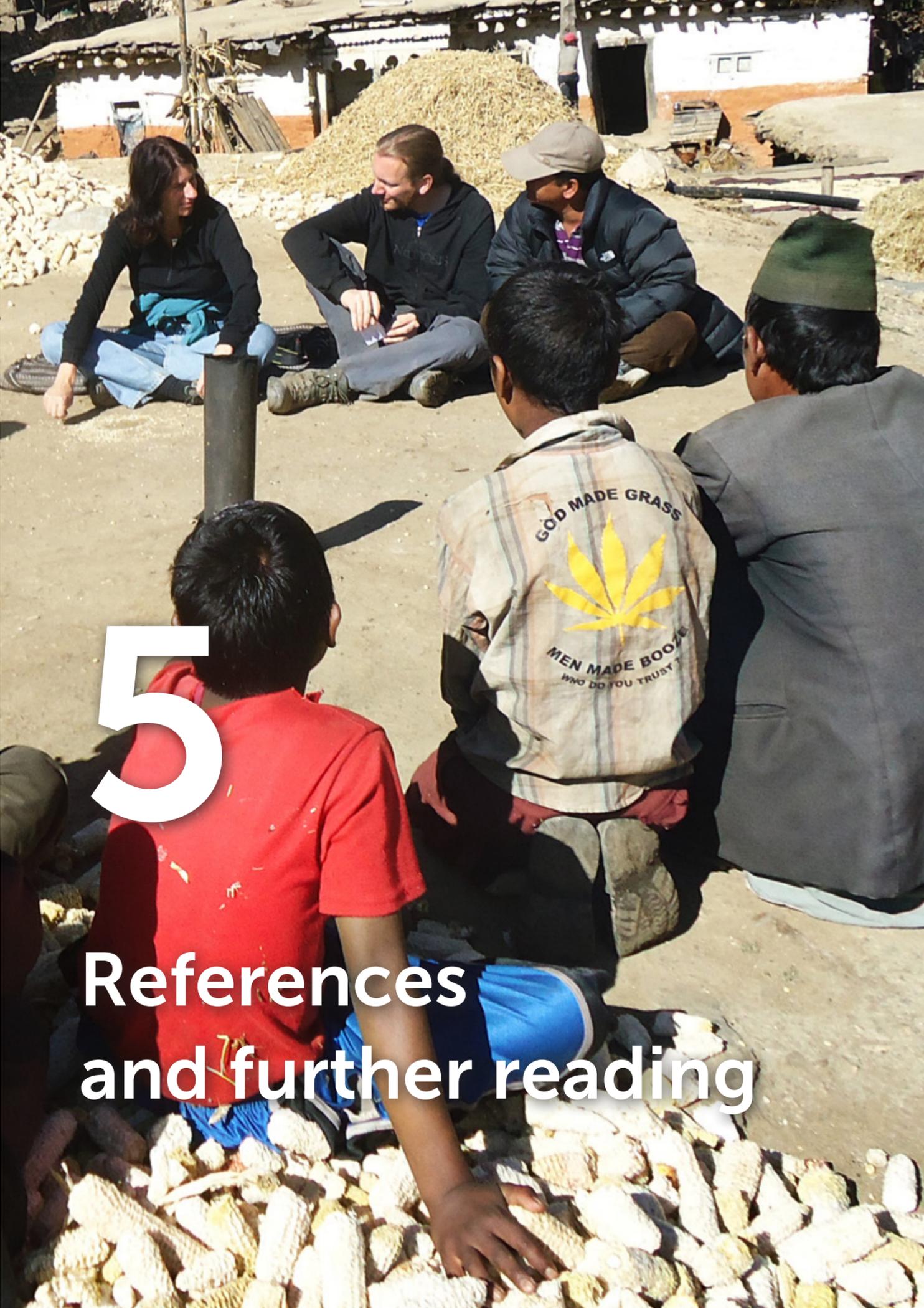
Having identified the factors that make us vulnerable, we are then in a position to reduce our exposure by employing appropriate security procedures and practice. Decide on the risk reduction measures that you plan to employ during your trip. If any of these require action by others (e.g. supervisor, host organisation, embassy) ensure that you liaise with and inform them.

At the end of your assessment and after planning measures to reduce the likelihood or impact, re-evaluate each threat or risk.

The example overleaf gives an idea of how you can present a risk assessment. Remember to update your risk assessment each time there is a significant change in the context or your activities.

Sample risk assessment

Threat	Likelihood (L)	Impact (I)	Level of risk (LxI)	Measures to reduce Likelihood	Measures to reduce Impact	Final level of risk
Road Traffic Accident	M	M	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check vehicle maintenance and equipment before leaving. • If you need to drive, ensure that you possess a valid driving licence and that you understand and observe the rules of the road. • Ensure regular breaks in the journey. Avoid travelling in extreme weather. • Avoid travelling at night. • Ensure driver respects road conditions and speed limits. • If travelling by public transport do not travel on overcrowded vehicles/those in poor mechanical state. • Know where you are going and how to get there – make sure there is a map in the car, and/or that your driver knows the route. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear seatbelts. • Take first aid kit (either personal or in the vehicle). • Ensure that someone knows where you are going and departure/arrival times. • Carry spare water/food and vehicle equipment (toolkit, jack, spare tyres) • Have phone numbers for key contacts including insurers, local medical facilities, police, and partners. 	L/M
Robbery (petty theft)	M	L	L/M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not carry unnecessary valuables. • Do not wear 'high-value clothing/jewellery'. • Be alert to the environment. • Know local context and avoid areas where theft is frequent, if possible. • Look confident and do not stand out as an easy target. Ensure bags/pockets are closed. • Be aware of where you are going. • Do not travel alone at night or in high-risk areas. • Be alert for 'decoys/distractions' – such as people asking for directions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not risk injury or death in defence of material possessions – hand these over if asked. • Keep your hands visible, and avoid sudden movements. • Cooperate by giving what is requested, but no more than is requested. 	L
Serious Disease/ Illness	L	M	L/M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat, drink and sleep sufficiently. • Keep good personal hygiene. • Ensure that your vaccinations are up to date. • Take anti-malarial drugs if in a malaria zone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you feel unwell, seek immediate medical attention. • Know where the good quality local medical facilities can be found 	L



5

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and further reading

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Websites

EISF: The European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) is an independent platform for Security Focal Points from European humanitarian agencies operating internationally. The EISF members contains a wealth of resources dedicated to improving the safety and security of relief operations and staff. www.eisf.eu

Alertne: News service from Reuters. www.alertnet.org

Dfid: Website of the Department of International Development. www.dfid.gov.uk

FCO: Website of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Includes travel advisory information, travel health advice and embassy contacts. www.fco.gov.uk/en

European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO): Gateway to ECHO's resources. ec.europa.eu/echo

FPRI Security and International Affairs Think Tank Directory: Lists think tanks devoted to Security and International Affairs research and education. Nearly 1000 institutions are represented, which you can browse by name or country. www.fpri.org/research/thinktanks

Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS): provides near real-time alerts about natural disasters around the world and tools to facilitate response coordination. www.gdacs.org

IRIN: News Service of the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs. www.irinnews.org

ReliefWeb: Source of information on context by country. Relief web scans the websites of international and non-governmental organisations, governments, research institutions and the media for news, reports, press releases, appeals, policy documents, analysis and maps related to humanitarian emergencies worldwide, and then consolidates them on its website. www.reliefweb.int

The Overseas Development Institute: Britain's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. www.odi.org

UNDSS: Website for the UN's Department of Safety and Security. www.un.org/undss

The Security Management Initiative (SMI): functions as a focussed human resource centre for risk and security management of NGOs and international agencies working in hostile environments. www.securitymanagementinitiative.org

Security related books and manuals

Organisational guidelines, manuals and frameworks

[Safety First: A safety and security handbook for aid workers](#)

Bickley, Shaun (Save The Children), 2010.

A comprehensive field guide for national and international staff working throughout the world. This manual is used by Save the Children personnel worldwide.

[Mainstreaming the Organisational Management of Safety and Security: A Review of Aid Agency Practices and a Guide for Management - HPG Report 9](#)

Koenraad Van Brabant (Humanitarian Policy Group), 2010.

[Good Practice Review: Operational security management in violent environments](#)
Humanitarian Policy Group, 2010.

This revised edition of the Security Management Handbook offers an overview of recent aid agency attempts to strengthen the management of safety and security.

[Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations](#)

European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), 2004. The aim of this guide, commissioned by ECHO, is help humanitarian NGOs manage their security effectively. It does so by offering tools, guidance and resources allowing agencies to think through their security policy and procedures. It is intended to be adapted to the particular needs of individual NGOs. It is available for download from the link above in English, French and Spanish.

[Stay Safe - International Federation's Guide to a Safer Mission](#)

Aimed at Red Cross and Red Crescent personnel, this manual together with the guide for security managers, provides the necessary tools to implement and maintain a well-functioning security framework when adapted to the specific context.

[Stay Safe - The International Federation's Guide for Security Managers](#)

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