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Office for Research, Engagement and Innovation Services (REIS)

International Office (IO)

## Research and Studies Abroad – Guidance on Ethics and Risk Management

This document is intended for staff who are doing research or are responsible for students conducting studies, fieldwork or internships abroad. The purpose is to provide general information and guidance concerning security issues and ethical challenges that may arise during such activities. Stockholm University's Research Integrity and Ethics Policy and other relevant governing documents should also be consulted.

Complementary information or specific documents at the departmental level or within specialized areas might be needed in certain cases. The overall goal of the guidance is to *protect students, staff and others affected by the research or studies, promote good research practice, and uphold the credibility and the reputation of Stockholm University as an institution of research and education*. Furthermore, during stays abroad, applicable recommendations of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs on ethical principles for service abroad should be followed.<sup>1</sup>

### **Risk Assessment**

A general assessment of potential risks linked to the research or study should be carried out at the planning stage. An adequate level of quality and security should be ensured, and the resource utilization as well as potential risks must stand in reasonable proportion to the expected value of the research or studies. The overall goal of the risk assessment should be to protect students, staff and others affected by the research or studies. Furthermore, it should safeguard good research practice and ensure the credibility of the university as well as its reputation as an institution of research and education.

Key factors to include in the risk assessment are: the content of the research or study; the security situation in the region and at the host department; the work environment and resources of the host department and its overall suitability; relevant cultural aspects; and the suitability of potential external funding agencies. Finally, the assessment must consider

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<sup>1</sup>Ethical guidelines, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs: <https://www.utbyten.se/globalassets/2.-program/uds-etiska-riktlinjer-vid-utlandstjanstgoring-2021-10-01.pdf> (in Swedish)



whether the research/studies can be carried out in accordance with the regulations and ethical principles, which apply in Sweden and in the host country.

The department or equivalent entity responsible for the research or studies, will also be responsible for the risk and security assessment as described above, including ethical considerations. This is particularly important in relation to students at bachelors and masters level, doctoral students, postdocs and other junior researchers. Senior researchers should also check their own assessment with the Head of Department or equivalent, especially concerning security, work environment and implementation of regulations and ethical guidelines. Ethical and security issues linked to field studies carried out within the framework of Sida's Minor Field Studies scholarship programme (MFS) are assessed at the departmental level and by the central MFS Committee, of the university.<sup>2</sup> The experience of the student/researcher regarding these factors should be taken into account as part of the assessment.

### **High Risk Areas**

Stays in high risk areas, such as war and conflict zones, should normally be avoided. The department should ensure that students and staff are informed, prior to a stay abroad, of the travel recommendations of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry advises against travels to a country or parts of a country where the security situation is perceived to be dangerous, unpredictable or rapidly changing. In some cases, a specific risk assessment may be necessary, for instance if the student or staff member belongs to a group at risk of violence or harassment in the region concerned, or if the student or staff member is not a Swedish citizen.

### **Basis for risk assessment**

Information and relevant considerations for the risk assessment as well as for the overall assessment should be prepared and documented by the department. The responsibility for carrying out the assessment lies with the Head of Department. The format, scope and level of detail of the information may vary according to the conditions of the particular case, as long as it provides sufficient information in order to carry out a reliable risk assessment. In certain cases, standard basic information such as an itinerary and contact details during the travel may suffice. In other cases, a project plan or a more thorough risk assessment may be needed. If data is to be collected or processed, a special data management plan should be prepared as part of or as a supplement to the plan.<sup>4</sup> The information may have to be updated during the stay, in which case a new risk assessment could become necessary.

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<sup>2</sup> Guidelines of the Swedish Council for Higher Education for Minor Field Studies: <http://www.utbyten.se/program/minor-field-studies> (in Swedish)

<sup>3</sup> Whether travel to a high-risk area is considered as *necessary or not*, is decided on a case by case basis by the Head of Department. Travel recommendations and advice against certain travels, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs: <https://www.regeringen.se/uds-reseinformation/> (in Swedish)

<sup>4</sup> Stockholm University, Data Management Plan: <https://www.su.se/staff/researchers/research-data/manage-store-data/create-a-data-management-plan-1.657312>



If the risk assessment raises doubts about the possibility to carry out the project in a safe and ethically justifiable way, alternative ways of achieving the objective of the research or study should be considered. The responsible department/equivalent should provide clear information to students on how the assessment at the examination may be affected by a deviation from an approved project plan or by the lack of such a plan.

### **Regulations, Guidelines and Ethical Standards**

Consideration must be given to regulations and ethical guidelines which apply in Sweden and at the university in question, as well as to those applicable in the host country and at the host department, and all necessary permissions must be obtained.<sup>5</sup> For instance, whenever required, approval must be obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority<sup>6</sup> and from the equivalent entity in the host country.<sup>7</sup> Necessary approvals for experiments on animals must also be obtained.<sup>8</sup> All processing of personal data must also be carried out in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and supplementary national legislation<sup>9</sup>. If the research or study requires the use of genetical resources or traditional knowledge of such resources, adherence to the Nagoya Protocol and the EU ABS Regulation must be assured.<sup>10</sup>

In cases where the regulations or ethical guidelines of the host country or host institution is more permissive than Swedish regulations or guidelines, the latter should form the basis for the risk assessment. For instance, it does not suffice to follow regulations in the host country regarding the protection of humans and animals if such regulations do not correspond to Swedish standards. In such cases, additional measures should be taken to secure an adequate level of protection.<sup>11</sup> Where there is uncertainty regarding ethical considerations, staff of the

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<sup>5</sup> Important documents are the ALLEA European Code of Conduct: <https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf> and Good Research Practice:

[https://www.vr.se/download/18.5639980c162791bbfe697882/1555334908942/Good-Research-Practice\\_VR\\_2017.pdf](https://www.vr.se/download/18.5639980c162791bbfe697882/1555334908942/Good-Research-Practice_VR_2017.pdf). Some of the guidelines and regulations applicable in Sweden can be found on the CODEX website: <http://www.codex.vr.se/index.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> <https://etikprovning.myndigheten.se/> (in Swedish)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.su.se/staff/personnel/words-from-the-management/on-the-question-of-ethical-review-1.635359>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.djurforsok.info/lagar-regler/> (in Swedish)

<sup>9</sup> Stockholm University and GDPR: <https://www.su.se/english/staff/organisation-governance/legal-information>

<sup>10</sup> Nagoya Protocol and the EU ABS Regulation: <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/arter-och-artskydd/genetiska-resurser-nagoyaprotokollet>

<sup>11</sup> Global code of conduct for research in resource-poor settings, ie art. 14, 17, 18 and 23:

[https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/coc\\_research-resource-poor-settings\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/coc_research-resource-poor-settings_en.pdf)



university is urged to get in touch with the ethics support function at the Office for Research, Engagement and Innovation Services (REIS).<sup>12</sup>

### **Export Control**

In order to export certain sensitive products, technology and information from the EU, an export permit is required (in some cases, a permit is also required for transfer between countries within the EU). This applies, among other things, to products with dual use areas (PDA), i.e. products which, in addition to civilian uses, may also have military uses, as well as knowledge of the manufacture and use of such products. As a researcher, it is your responsibility to ensure that the necessary permits are in place before export, but support is available through the university's export control officer<sup>13</sup>.

### **Inappropriate Tasks**

Students or staff should not carry out tasks considered to impose serious security risks, or tasks that they would not have been allowed to carry out in Sweden with regards to their competence and relevant regulations, e.g. concerning the work environment. Students or staff should be given clear information of their right to refrain from such tasks. If necessary, they should be able to refer to the responsible supervisor or Head of Department at Stockholm University for support in the matter. If, due to such restrictions, a student cannot achieve the purpose of the studies, the department should assist the student in finding alternative solutions.

### **Host Department and External Funding Agencies**

The host department and possible external funding agencies, as well as the conditions related to the hosting or the funding, should be examined with regard to potential ethical or judicial obstacles and risks that could negatively affect the reputation of the university or the independence of the research.<sup>14</sup> The assessment should take into account whether the host department/funding agencies contribute to activities which involve violations of human rights or may damage humans, animals, climate or cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup>

Agreements should be established with the host department, the funding agency and other possible collaborators. Agreements and conditions that apply should be clearly documented. Stockholm University usually refrains from making general decisions on the suitability of

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<sup>12</sup> Stockholm University, Research and Ethics: <https://www.su.se/staff/researchers/2.38406/research-integrity-and-ethics-7.158254>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.su.se/staff/organisation-governance/governing-documents-rules-and-regulations/safety-security-and-irregularities/procedure-for-export-control-1.631484>

<sup>14</sup> See [Good Research Practice](#), Swedish Research Council, chapter 5: [https://www.vr.se/download/18.5639980c162791bbfc697882/1555334908942/Good-Research-Practice\\_VR\\_2017.pdf](https://www.vr.se/download/18.5639980c162791bbfc697882/1555334908942/Good-Research-Practice_VR_2017.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Compare with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity: <https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf>



research funding agencies, but according to an earlier decision, no research project at the university may be supported by the tobacco industry (dnr SU 50-0217-03).

### **Contingency Plan**

Every department or equivalent should have a contingency plan containing precise procedures for dealing with situations that might arise in connection with stays abroad. The contingency plan should be complementary to the central crisis management plan of the university<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, it should contain clear information on insurance agreements and provide the names of persons at Stockholm University who are responsible for handling various security problems that might occur. Complete and up-to-date information must be given about the ways of establishing contact between the student/staff and a person in charge or otherwise dedicated to these issues at the host department. Specific contingency plans may be necessary for certain projects or types of projects.

Students/staff and those responsible for the research or studies at Stockholm University should be well informed about existing routines. If the stay abroad needs to be interrupted, the department/equivalent should offer support, for instance through consultations and guidance on how to regain missed credits. Health related support will be offered to students through Stockholm Student Health Services and staff are invited to contact the occupational health services company, Feelgood Företagshälsövård AB.

### **Insurance**

Staff are covered by a travel insurance through Kammarkollegiet (The Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency). When travelling abroad in the line of duty, staff should bring a certificate entitled Swedish State Business Travel Insurance Certificate. For information on conditions related to the insurance, please refer to Kammarkollegiet.<sup>17</sup>

Students studying abroad through exchange agreements, the Sida Minor Field Studies (MFS) programme or through an Erasmus+ Internship Programme, are covered by an insurance through Kammarkollegiet, Swedish State's Insurance during Education Abroad, Student UT.<sup>18</sup> As for students who are not covered by this insurance, the responsible department should

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.su.se/medarbetare/organisation-styrning/styrdokument-regelboken/s%C3%A4kerhet-och-f%C3%B6rtroendeskadligt-gerande/krisplan-vid-stockholms-universitet-1.620134>

<sup>17</sup> Stockholm University, Travel Insurance: [\(in Swedish\)](https://www.su.se/medarbetare/anst%C3%A4lld/anst%C3%A4llningsvillkor/f%C3%B6rs%C3%A4kringar#f%C3%B6rs%C3%A4kring%20vid%20resor%20(in%20Swedish))

<sup>18</sup> Kammarkollegiet will implement new insurance terms as of 2021-07-01. The insurance does not apply in countries where the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises against all travel. If the Ministry advises against all travel to a specific area in a country, the insurance does not apply in that part of the country. If the insured has already commenced the travel prior to the advice against travel, the insurance is valid for a set period (maximum 30 days) for the insured to leave the country. The insurance continues to apply in countries and areas where the Ministry advises against all non-essential travel. Insurance during education abroad (Student



make sure that the student will be adequately insured during the stay abroad, for example by arranging an insurance through Kammarkollegiet. The student needs to carry the insurance certificate throughout the stay.

### **Urgent situations**

If immediate assistance is needed due to urgent incidents, such as injuries, accidents or a changed security situation, students and staff who are covered by Kammarkollegiet's insurances may contact Falck Global Assistance<sup>19</sup>.

At Stockholm University, a duty officer can be reached twenty-four hours a day. As a first step, the student/staff should communicate with his/her designated contact person at Stockholm University. If necessary, the contact person informs the duty officer who is responsible for determining whether the incident should be considered a crisis or an extraordinary event. If the incident so requires, the duty officer can alert the crisis management team of the university. The basic principle of the crisis management team is to follow the advice of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, but it also has the option to cooperate with responsible authorities.

Outgoing students/staff are recommended to inform the Swedish Embassy of their arrival in order to sign up to the "list of Swedes" in the country they visit. In this way, the Embassy is aware of their presence and can easily reach out with information in case the security situation would change. The Swedish Embassy can always be contacted in case of emergency. Please note, for student/staff without a Swedish personal identity number, other procedures may apply.

### **Checklist for Students/Staff prior to Visits Abroad**

- ✓ **Project plan/ basic project itinerary:** Has a project plan or a basic project itinerary of the envisaged research or study period abroad been established and approved by the supervisor/ Head of Department or equivalent? Can the project be carried out in a

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UT): <https://www.kammarkollegiet.se/engelska/start/all-services/insurance-for-foreign-visitors/student-insurance/insurance-during-education-abroad>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.falck.com/about-us/contact-us>



sufficiently secure way?

- ✓ **Travel itinerary:** Has the travel itinerary been confirmed by the responsible persons at the institution?
- ✓ **Security-related and ethical risk assessment:** Has an adequate level of quality and security been ensured? Are the necessary resources and the potential risks proportionate to the expected value of the research/studies? Does the risk assessment take the combined goals of protecting students, employees and others affected by research/studies, promoting good research practice and upholding the credibility and reputation of the university, into account?
- ✓ **Responsible supervisor/Head of Department:** Is it clearly stated which department or equivalent is responsible for the research/studies and hence also which supervisor/Head of Department is in charge of assessing the risk and security level prior to the travel as well as during the stay abroad? Is it clearly stated which supervisor/Head of Department to contact in case of problems that may arise during the stay?
- ✓ **Agreements with host department and funding agencies:** Have the conditions of hosting and external funding been examined in order to ensure that a) there are no ethical or judicial obstacles and that b) the reputation of the university or the independence of the research do not risk being endangered? Have agreements been established with the host department, funding agencies and other possible partners?
- ✓ **Examination of ethical principles and guidelines:** Has due consideration been given to the regulations and ethical principles applicable in Sweden and at the university as well as in the host country and at the host department? Have all necessary permissions been issued? Will the handling of personal data follow the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and supplementary national legislation? Has the EU ABS Regulation on the Nagoya Protocol been taken into consideration?
- ✓ **Plan for handling data:** Has a special plan for handling data been drawn up as part of the project plan/ basic project itinerary or as an attachment to it?
- ✓ **Strategy in case of inappropriate tasks:** Does the project plan or basic project itinerary clearly state that no tasks that may imply serious security risks nor tasks that the student or staff would not have been allowed to perform in Sweden will be accepted? In case of inappropriate tasks, does the student or staff member have a strategy to refer to the responsible supervisor/Head of Department at Stockholm University?



- ✓ **Contingency plan:** Is there a contingency plan at the department with clear routines for handling situations that may arise in relation to stays abroad? Is there a person in charge of handling various security issues that may arise? Is there complete and updated information on how to establish contact between the student/staff and the person in charge or another suitable representative at the host department?
- ✓ **Insurance:** Has the department or equivalent entity issued a valid certificate of insurance to the traveler covering the stay abroad? Does the insurance comply with the regulations of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs regarding advice against travel?