Polis Open Learning

Mitigating Risks in High-Risk Travel:
the importance of ISO 31030 for NGOs and Non-Profit Organizations

BY

ELISA CAPPONI

SOAS MA graduate in Global Diplomacy with more than 10 years' field experience in the humanitarian sector and a strong profile in NGO security analysis and advice

ANDREA PIOVAN

Security Manager with 25 years of corporate experience in EMEA projects for profit and No-Profit organizations, Travel Security Expert

ISO 31030, launched in September 2021 by ISO (International Organization for Standardization: an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 167 national standards bodies), is an essential framework guideline that provides the foundations, route map, and benchmark for travel security programs. It will assist organizations and those responsible for travel security governance alike before, during and after travel. Travel to high-risk destinations is an essential part of the work done by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit sector. Given the increased level of insecurity recorded in many contexts, and the fact that NGOs are considerate a legitimate target by many extremist groups in many insecure zones, this type of travel comes an increased level of risk. To ensure the safety of employees, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment that includes identifying potential risks associated with the traveler's itinerary, personal health, and the local security environment, and apply the necessary mitigation measures. Travel security is a fundamental part for a solid implementation of NGO activities, and as such should be carefully planned and delivered.

ISO 31030 provides guidance on conducting a comprehensive risk assessment and establishing a risk management process for organizations. It emphasizes the importance of the triangle of protection-prevention-acceptance, which includes protecting employees from harm, preventing incidents from occurring, and accepting residual risks that cannot be eliminated.

This approach is crucial for NGOs and non-profit organizations, as it helps ensure that employees are safe while carrying out their work in high-risk environments.

The safety of employees is paramount for a successful output of NGO work, and it also reassures donors that they investment is in good hands. In addition, the impact that incidents can have on operations should not be underestimated: security incidents, especially when impacting staff, can have serious repercussion on the accountability and on the reputation of organizations at both local and international level.

The assessment should cover threats to their safety, security, and health, including crime, kidnapping, political violence, civil unrest, armed conflict, environment, infrastructure, medical/health, surveillance and monitoring, information security, and wellbeing and mental health. The first step in the risk assessment process is to identify potential risks associated with the traveler's itinerary.

This includes assessing the local security environment, political climate, and health risks in the destination country. In addition, careful planning should include the handling of bureaucracy at port of arrival, as for example the provision of appropriate VISAs, and how to respond to queries from immigration and law enforcement authorities. In order to handle unforeseeable situation such as delays or forced stopover in other countries before arriving at destination, a variety of currency and different ways of payment should be part of the minimum departure package.

Main health threats in the country of destination should be evaluated beforehand, and all the necessary vaccinations, where applicable, should be carried out before departure. A medical insurance should be stipulated before travelling and contact details and procedures to submit claims should always be at hand. In addition, the traveler should always carry enough essential medications to cover for the length of the assignment.

Once the risks have been identified, appropriate measures should be put in place to mitigate these risks. Employees deployed to high security risk areas should be trained on how to react and behave in case of an incident. This includes providing travelers with the necessary training and equipment to protect themselves on the move. This may include practical security training such as Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT), which provides travelers with hands-on experience and advice on what to expect in high-risk locations. In addition to training and equipment, it is also important to establish clear communication protocols and emergency response plans. In this sense, clear communication lines and appropriate training in communication means such as satellite phones, should be put in place.

Travelers should know who to contact in case of an emergency and what steps to take to ensure their safety. This includes establishing relationships with local contacts and diplomatic missions, as well as registering trip with the main base in the country, and with headquarters abroad. An accurate stakeholder analysis based on risk mitigation should be carefully carried out well before departure time and consolidated on arrival. Finally, a crisis management plan should be put in place in case of abduction or critical incident.

NGOs and non-profit organizations should also consider partnering with travel risk management platforms to streamline and automate the risk assessment process. These platforms can provide real-time information on potential risks in the destination country and help travelers stay informed of any changes to the security or operational environment in a timely manner.

Effective travel risk management is achieved through a deep understanding of the inter-relationships between policy, stakeholder engagement, and regular reviews. To ensure the safety of employees traveling to high-risk destinations, organizations need to establish a comprehensive risk assessment process and implement appropriate mitigation measures. Regular reviews of the travel risk management program can help identify areas that require improvement and ensure that it remains effective in mitigating potential risks. By integrating policy, stakeholder engagement, and regular reviews, organizations can establish an agile and effective travel risk management program that ensures the safety and well-being of employees.

Polis Open Learning

In conclusion, ISO 31030 is a crucial framework guideline for NGOs and non-profit organizations that travel to high-risk destinations. By conducting a comprehensive risk assessment, identifying potential risks associated with the traveler's itinerary, personal health, and the local security environment, and using the triangle of protection-prevention-acceptance approach, organizations can reduce the risks associated with high-risk travel and ensure the safety of their employees. Providing appropriate training, equipment, communication protocols, and emergency response plans can help employees stay safe while carrying out their work in high-risk environments and can ensure a positive outcome of programming.

ELISA CAPPONI e ANDREA PIOVAN

17 MARZO 2023