Guide for risk assessments and security applications in Danida supported research projects

Justification

As of 2022, all applications for funds under the support for development research provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark are required to submit a risk assessment, and if relevant, a plan for mitigating measures and include additional funds for relevant security measures in the project design.

Based on the risk assessments received as of spring 2023, the Danida Fellowship Centre and the Consultative Committee for Development research concludes that it is challenging to ensure a standardization of risk assessment and mitigating measure descriptions across applications, and that the quality of both vary significantly.

Therefore, this document has been developed, to guide applicants and ongoing research projects in what is expected of a "good" risk assessment, and allow for inspiration and additional understanding of the concept of "physical risk" in research projects.

It is a minimum requirement that applicants consider the physical safety of project participants when developing the mandatory risk assessment.

This document is supplemented by an example of a well-analyzed and well written risk assessment including mitigating measures. (Appendix 1)

Background

In the fall 2022, ongoing projects funded by Danida were asked to submit a risk assessment for their project, along with an application for additional funds to cover relevant security measures related to the risk assessment.

In Danida funded research projects, the following categories of measures are relevant:

1. Security measures within the eligible additional funds, linked directly to medium or high risks identified in the risk assessment (up to DKK 400.000 on top of the maximum amount of DKK 10.000.000):
   o Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) course for project staff involved in field work in high-risk settings (from Denmark and from partnering countries)
   o Expanded first aid courses
   o Security assessment and consultancy from specialized companies
   o If necessary, expenses for professional tracking of staff doing field work in high-risk settings (only for limited time periods where it is considered necessary based on the advice given by a professional security company)

2. Additional safety measures, which can be included in the general budget for the project, within the maximum framework of DKK 10.000.000, but not covered by the eligible additional funds.

3. Best Practice for developing a risk assessment and mitigation measures, which do not necessarily add any additional costs to the project, e.g. development of internal procedures and policies for safety.

This document gathers main lessons learned from the risk assessments developed by ongoing research projects, and is based on general tendencies across assessments and plans for mitigating measures, as well as drawing inspiration from individual projects with especially well developed security considerations and plans for mitigating measures. These points have been cross-checked with this guide by the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE), where further inspiration can also be found.

The examples and best practices below do not constitute an exhaustive list, and should furthermore be revisited and updated regularly, at least once per year.

General recommendations

Involve all parties in the risk assessment and development of mitigating measures:
All partners involved in the project have unique insight into the risks associated with operating in the selected area(s), and risks may vary depending on individual identity markers.
It is important to include all project participants in the considerations of risk and safety, and not to reserve these considerations for Danish project participants traveling to the partner country(/ies).

Consider geography, timing and need for field work:
- Create a flexible set-up that allows for changes to the field study areas and allows for other relevant mitigating measures that may be relevant during the project period.
- Consider where, how much and when, fieldwork is necessary for the project.

Set up policies for fieldwork:
Make sure all individuals involved in the project knows about the security related policies and procedures, regardless of their role in the project.
E.g.:
- Consider who goes where, and what requirements there should be for going alone or as a group respectively.
- Consider setting up standard risk assessments for each field trip, e.g. based on example in appendix 2.
- Consider requirements for when, and how often, researchers should check in or notify of their whereabouts before, during and after field work or travels related to the project.
- Consider what the channels of communication should be in cases of crisis, unexpected events, dangerous situations etc.
- Set up procedures for debriefing of researchers after time in the field/collecting data, or in case anyone experience violent or sensitive situations.

Make training mandatory and available:
- Consider which trainings or other measures are mandatory or encouraged, and for whom. HEAT courses and expanded first aid will be mandatory for all researchers doing field work in new Danida funded research projects in high-risk settings.
- Consider whether there might be added benefit by conducting joint HEAT for project participants from Denmark and partnering countries.
- Make the requirements and opportunities clear and widely known in the project group, so all involved researchers are aware of what is expected of them, and what they can expect from their project lead and their institution respectively.

Cyber security:
- Consider whether communication and data storage needs to be encrypted or protected in any way beyond regular requirements from the involved institutions.
- The security of various encrypted communication services can change over time, so if it is necessary, make sure to stay updated, and/or consider involving a professional cyber security consultancy firm.

Other security measures:
- Other security measures can include pre-field work briefings and consultation with specialized security firms, additional travel insurance, tracking during field work, hiring of specialized vehicles/guards etc.
- Consider affiliations and local perceptions – are e.g. government vehicles a safety measure, or are they a risk in themselves, depending on the region.
- Some places may have official requirements for foreigners travelling outside main cities.

What can be covered by additional funds for security in the application:
Only HEAT, first aid, consultancy by specialized firms and tracking can be covered by additional funds from Danida, but projects are encouraged to include other relevant measures in the regular budget frame.