



INTERNATIONAL
SOS

COVID-19 & GLOBAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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“On top of the complexities that the pandemic has added to managing travel, those variables present new challenges for companies’ risk managers and other stakeholders looking after their workforce’s resilience, both while travelling internationally and in their domestic location.”

GLOBAL TRENDS TOWARDS THE END OF 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic that struck the world in 2020 has reshaped it, affecting the way we work, travel and interact with our peers and communities. Its social, political and economic implications vary and are yet to be fully comprehended and felt, amid persisting uncertainty over the way the pandemic will pursue its course and how different countries – and their populations – will respond to it in the longer run.

On top of the complexities that the pandemic has added to managing travel, it has diversely impacted security environments, presenting new challenges for companies’ risk managers and other stakeholders looking after their workforce’s resilience, both while travelling internationally and at their domestic location.

In many places, the unprecedented crisis has either caused or exacerbated socio-economic difficulties, triggering lay-offs, wage cuts and furloughs offset by varying degrees of state support. Mandatory lockdowns have hit hard communities relying on revenues from the informal sector, particularly in Latin America and Africa. This context is expected to prompt or revive protest campaigns temporarily muted by movement restrictions, as well as fuel localised upticks in crime.

By casting a stark light on the limitations of state support, the pandemic has enabled criminal groups to increase their influence amid low-income communities or gain footholds in new areas. Like everyone else, criminal actors have adjusted to the ‘new normal’, including by adapting their targeting patterns – and causing variations in their security environments.

The pandemic has also provided an opportunity for intense geopolitical arm-wrestling, particularly between China and the US, as well as fuelling up domestic political debates. In the US and western Europe, the risk of political violence has increased amid heightened mistrust towards the authorities, polarisation and disinformation – especially around the pandemic and measures required to fight it – and the growth, in this unsettling context, of fringe ideologies.

Some governments – in Eastern Europe and Central Asia notably – have been perceived as cracking down on dissent or reinforcing their hold on power under the pretext of fighting COVID-19, by restricting gatherings or postponing elections. Elsewhere, opposition groups have seized this opportunity to grow their support base by criticising government action, or the lack thereof.

This paper provides an overview of the key trends observed by our security experts in their respective regions in relation to the global COVID-19 pandemic, as well as our recommendations to best prepare and respond to them in the short-to-medium term.

KEY JUDGEMENTS

- Pre-existing socio-economic issues have been exacerbated by movement restrictions as well as by the wider economic consequences of COVID-19, fuelling unrest. Informal workers have been hit particularly hard by lockdowns.
- In many locations, security forces have had to enforce pandemic-related restrictions in well-populated urban areas, reducing focus on the provision of security elsewhere. In parallel, criminal groups have adopted new tactics to maintain their revenues.
- Elections scheduled for this year will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, whether as a result of postponements or due to the impact on voter registration, campaigning and turnout of social distancing measures.

One of the most visible consequences of lockdown measures has been increased social unrest across the continent. COVID-19-related restrictions have exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic issues, including unemployment and poverty, eliciting public discontent and competition over resources. Due to the potential reinstatement of restrictions, along with inadequate social security measures to soften their socio-economic impact, this uptick in unrest is expected to persist.

South Africa's economy is projected to shrink significantly due to lost tourism revenue and shuttered businesses, with the country's treasury estimating that 1.79m people could become unemployed. New protest trends have emerged, targeted at the government's pandemic response and planned job cuts by large companies. Mineworkers' and metalworkers' unions demonstrated against planned layoffs outside gold mining plants in July. Large corporations, mining companies and other industrial areas remain more vulnerable to unrest as the economic fallout persists.

The economic downturn and movement restrictions have particularly reduced revenue streams for **South Africa's** informal workers and contributed to the perception that immigrants from nearby African countries are taking the majority of available jobs. Hashtags relaying anti-immigrant messages have proliferated, with calls to mass protests increasing on social media, some of them targeting specific nationalities, such as Nigerians. While upticks of xenophobia fuelled by misinformation are most common in **South Africa**, particularly at times of financial hardship, the UNHCR has warned in August of increased reports of xenophobia and stigmatisation of

refugees across southern Africa.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, fear that foreigners may carry and spread the virus also led to some xenophobic incidents targeting Asians in **Kenya** and **Ethiopia**. The US embassy in Ethiopia issued a warning in March of increasing reports of anti-foreigner sentiment and incidents in the capital Addis Ababa as well as other cities. Related, localised incidents of xenophobic violence cannot be entirely ruled out while the pandemic is still rampant.

Elsewhere, **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sudan**, where significant resources are already channelled towards managing complex security issues, such as militancy or active conflicts, will increasingly struggle to provide social safety nets to their population, which is likely to contribute to increased crime. A possible reinstatement of strict movement restrictions will lead to the redeployment of security forces to focus on the enforcement of social distancing measures, increasing existing security gaps – particularly in those countries where law enforcement capabilities are lacking outside major urban centres.

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Criminal groups have adapted to the ‘new normal’ of life under COVID-19 by changing their tactics and targets.

In **Kenya**, criminal gangs have taken advantage of vulnerable communities that do not have access to a swift law enforcement response. In rural areas, banditry-related crime increased as police and security forces were redeployed to urban areas to enforce curfews. Risk management procedures will need adjusting to new, unusual criminal patterns.

Communal clashes over resources such as land and livestock are also likely to intensify in the short term, particularly in communities that depend on agriculture and are affected by a fall in crop prices due to lower demand and a general reduction in job opportunities. Cattle-rustling incidents in countries such as **Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan** could devolve into cycles of intercommunal, retaliatory attacks. The pandemic has also hit during a busy electoral year across the continent. As case numbers rise, governments that have decided to hold elections at the end of this year will face the choice of either holding polls amid heightened risks posed by the virus, or postponing them but risking escalating political tensions. Increasing distrust in government

policies will lead to a reduction in support for ruling parties, as will the perceived authoritarian tendencies of some administrations.

In **Ethiopia**, general elections, initially set for August 2020, have officially been postponed due to the pandemic. The ruling Prosperity Party (PP) will remain in power in the interim, a decision questioned by many opposition parties, which have accused Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his PP of using the crisis as a pretext to prolong their tenure.

Likewise, **Cote d'Ivoire** may decide to postpone the 31 October presidential election amid controversy fuelled by incumbent president Alassane Ouattara's candidacy to a third mandate. Although unlikely, a postponement without any further compromises by Ouattara on demands formulated by the opposition - such as stepping back from his renewed presidential bid - would elicit further popular discontent, increase current unrest and exacerbate the risk of communal clashes.

In other electoral cycles scheduled for this year - such as in **Niger** (December 2020) and **Burkina Faso** (November 2020) - a renewed uptick in cases of COVID-19 could affect turnout rates, threatening the perceived legitimacy of democratic processes.

KEY JUDGEMENTS

- The COVID-19 crisis is expected to hit Latin America particularly hard, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicting a 9% contraction of its economy – its worst recession on record. The most affected countries economically include Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru.
- In some countries, like Mexico and Brazil, the pandemic has exposed states' inability to support their most vulnerable communities, enabling organised criminal gangs to expand their influence by providing aid and enforcing order, thus altering local security dynamics.
- The pandemic has also fanned political divisiveness. In the US, the risk of politically motivated violence around the November general elections has increased due to the growing influence of fringe ideologies, the circulation of dis/misinformation and divisive rhetoric in the political space.

Socio-economic imbalance exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis will negatively impact security environments in Latin America and the US in the months ahead. The initial stages of the crisis saw a fall in crime rates in most countries across the region, as many governments implemented stringent mobility restrictions. However, organised criminal groups diversified their illicit activities with some success – as in Mexico.

Statistics released by the Mexican National Public Security System (SNSP) recorded 17,982 homicides between January and June 2020, a 1.9% increase compared with the same period in 2019. The SNSP report noted that most of the regions which experienced high levels of violence were areas where cartels/organised criminal groups were especially active. Conflicts between rival groups vying for the control of territory and revenue from illegal activities will continue to drive violent crime levels in the country in the medium term.


As COVID-19-related restrictions ease, the economic pressure resulting from the health crisis can be expected to translate into a rise in petty and opportunistic crime. Criminal activities ranging from online scams and phishing, targeting individual users, to more expansive financial cybercrimes focusing on businesses and banks will also remain a concern as pandemic-linked mobility constraints necessitate greater reliance on remote solutions for business continuity.

One by-product of the pandemic and associated restrictions was a decrease of anti-government unrest in the region. However, the medium-to-long-term negative economic and security implications of the pandemic are

expected to lead to a resumption of protests which could translate into unrest and challenge embattled governments in **Bolivia** and **Haiti**. Sporadic, unruly demonstrations over restrictions, supply shortages or demands for increased government support during the pandemic have occurred in **Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador** and **Honduras**.

In **Brazil**, President Jair Bolsonaro's aggressive rhetoric and seeming resistance to commonly accepted measures to fight the spread of COVID-19 has fuelled divisiveness and elicited criticism, in light of the high number of cases recorded in the country – second only to the US in the region. The federal government's response to the health crisis has triggered numerous, but mostly peaceful, demonstrations in recent months in the capital Brasilia and other major urban centres. Revelations over alleged embezzlement by officials of funds destined to the purchase of equipment in relation to the pandemic are likely to fuel further protests in the short-to-medium term.

Political uncertainty stemming from the suspension or postponement of elections due to the COVID-19 crisis has the potential to increase anti-government sentiment.



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In **Bolivia**, an interim government remains in place following the postponement of national elections to October 2020 due to the pandemic. This follows widespread civil unrest over disputed election results that led to the departure of then president Evo Morales in late 2019. The elections have been deferred three times so far, which has prompted protests and roadblocks by the Movement for Socialism (MAS) and other social movements attempting to destabilise the interim government. Another delay would fuel increased unrest, though the forcible removal of the transition government is unlikely.

In **Haiti**, parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2019 have not been held due to the absence of an electoral law. President Jovenel Moïse has yet to set a date for the overdue polls, even as opposition elements continue to call for his removal and the installation of a transition government. Moïse may attempt to combine the polls with the next presidential election, expected around February 2021. While anti-Moïse protests subsided during the pandemic, growing frustration with the political situation, intermittent shortages of fuel and essential commodities, and growing insecurity linked to increasing gang violence will heighten the potential for political unrest in the short-to-medium term.

In **Northern America**, the US has been severely hit by the pandemic; as of mid-September 2020, the country reported the world's highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. In early September, the country's unemployment rate sat at 8.4%, up from 3.5% in February. Stay-at-home orders, the closure of social venues and the fear of contagion have led to increased isolation, which has been conducive to misinformation and the growth of fringe beliefs – particularly among individuals and groups that have historically been sceptical of perceived government overreach.

Acute political divisiveness, fed by successive controversies over the government's handling of the pandemic and an unprecedented protest campaign against police brutality, has heightened the risk of political violence ahead of the general elections due on 3 November.

KEY JUDGEMENTS

- The global economic downturn has particularly hit export-dependent economies in the region, fuelling socio-economic grievances which will likely underpin high levels of social unrest in the short-to-medium term.
- The spread of false information blaming the outbreak of the virus on certain ethnic groups, as well as government policies perceived to grant special exemptions to foreigners amid stringent nationwide restrictions, have fuelled anti-foreigner sentiments.
- Upcoming elections may generate greater volatility and unrest, partly due to increasing distrust in government policies and perceived inadequate handling of the pandemic.

Socio-economic grievances have risen since the global pandemic brought challenges related to disrupted supply chains, movement controls and high unemployment to most economies across the region. Difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 crisis have also exacerbated socio-political concerns in countries where public discontent over the economic context was already driving demonstrations. As movement controls gradually ease, the long-lasting impact on the economy, including mass job losses, will continue to sustain the momentum of social unrest across affected countries, including **Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Thailand**.

Some of this discontent has translated into resentment directed at specific ethnic groups, especially in the early phases of the pandemic. In many instances, this sentiment was a mere extension of pre-existing tensions, perpetuated largely by disinformation associating the spread of the virus with certain ethnic groups, or government policies perceived to favour them. Isolated low-level incidents of harassment motivated by race or religion remain possible, especially if the pandemic and its associated economic impact worsen.

In **India**, factors driving public discontent and associated protests have constantly shifted since the onset of the pandemic. The main grievances are linked to socio-economic issues, contentious government decisions such as legislation recently adopted in the agricultural sector, as well as long-standing issues such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, which critics regard as discriminatory from a religious and ethnic standpoint. These are unlikely to be resolved in the short-to-medium term and are expected to prompt demonstrations over the coming months.

Labour unions and farmers' groups have been taking to the streets, while political parties have also called demonstrations. Protests have the potential to become more structured and organised, thereby growing in size and focusing on main urban centres.

In **Bangladesh**, garment workers have regularly demonstrated over factory closures and related layoffs caused by the cancellation of export orders. Opposition parties will seek to further capitalise on widespread resistance to unpopular government policies, such as the closure of jute mills and the Digital Security Act, which has raised concerns as to the potential curtailing freedom of speech and the media.

Protest locations are shifting from industrial sites to more populous urban centres, including the capital Dhaka and Chittagong city (Chittagong division), and the involvement of labour unions and political parties in leading protests mean that they are likely to grow in size.



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In **Thailand**, social distancing measures in March temporarily put on hold anti-government demonstrations, but discontent over the February dissolution of the opposition Future Forward Party persists. Protests were commonplace before the pandemic, with student groups demanding reform of the royal establishment and greater freedom of speech. Rising unemployment as well as the uncertainty generated by the authorities' decision to end a COVID-19 relief package have reinforced pre-existing grievances.

Following a gradual easing of movement controls in July, demonstrations picked up across urban centres such as the capital Bangkok and Chiang Mai (Chiang Mai province). Protests have been largely peaceful and relatively small.

However, as restrictions are further eased, they may resume with greater turnouts, posing a renewed challenge to the government.

Criticism over the government's handling of the pandemic is widespread in **Indonesia** as debates over the controversial Omnibus bill, meant to create more jobs and attract international investment, continue.

Protests against this bill have pre-dated the pandemic: labour and trade unions such as the influential Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions (KSPI) claim that the draft legislation will undermine workers' labour rights and remove minimum wage. Several groups have also accused the government of using the bill to ease the hiring of blue-collar workers from **China**, a contentious issue.

As movement restrictions ease into a 'new normal' amid persisting lay-offs and wage cuts, demonstrations can be expected to garner a higher turnout. The frequency of protests, even if they remain localised, is furthermore expected to increase around regional elections set for 9 December 2020.

In **China's** Special Administrative Region of **Hong Kong**, COVID-19-related restrictions on movement, particularly a ban on public gatherings of more than two people, have acted as deterrents against a protest movement which had been sustained and disruptive since June 2019. However, their eventual lifting is not expected to lead to a resumption of protest activity to levels observed in early 2020.

KEY JUDGEMENTS

- In the EU, now-dormant protest movements are likely to return to the streets once national bail-out packages expire. In Western Europe, conspiracy theorists are using social media to gain ground in public debates, fuelling mistrust in the authorities' handling of the pandemic.
- Dependence on oil export revenues and on remittances from migrant workers facing border closures will bring acute economic difficulties in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region, sparking off protests even in countries that are not prone to social unrest.
- With the approach of multiple elections, the crisis will impact the timing and conduct of some polls, while affecting dynamics between contenders. Georgia, Tajikistan and Ukraine are all due to hold elections in October.

For countries in the EU, the pandemic has resurrected the question of solidarity across the bloc as the crisis diversely impacts northern and southern economies. In late July, member states agreed on a financial support package – dubbed ‘Next Generation EU’ – to shoulder some of the immediate impacts of the pandemic on citizens, including a sharp rise in unemployment.

Nonetheless, most national bail-out measures are set to expire towards year-end, which will bring the issue back to the fore, particularly if a second peak of COVID-19 infections causes governments to return to stricter containment measures – with further economic consequences on businesses and jobs.

Following an initial compliance with lockdown measures, countries including **Belgium, France, Germany** and **Italy** have seen the return of protests and civil discontent. Protests have drawn together groups from various sides of the political spectrum as well as fringe groups, including conspiracy theorists, notably in **Germany** and the **UK**.

This is likely to continue, particularly if governments have to reinstate tighter restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19, given growing mistrust in the authorities fuelled by social media disinformation. Similar protests took place in **Italy** while in **France**, the ‘Yellow Vests’ protest movement has resumed its rallies, adding to its list of socio-economic grievances the government’s wider handling of the pandemic.

Countries in the EECA region will continue to face economic challenges exacerbated by persistent border closures and travel restrictions. **Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan**

and **Russia** will have to grapple with the impact from decreased oil export revenues since March. **Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan** and **Uzbekistan**, which traditionally have large numbers of migrant workers in Russia, and, to a lesser extent, in Kazakhstan, have been hit by reduced remittances.

Low-level protests prompted by economic grievances will occur in the short-to-medium term as an increased number of people are pushed below the poverty line due to rising unemployment, continued travel restrictions and limited economic support by governments.

The pandemic has also impacted the outbreak of hostilities between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** over Nagorno-Karabakh region and related issues in July and September-October 2020. Restrictions related to COVID-19 prompted the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to suspend the already limited monitoring mission in the region. However, the strong stance taken by both Armenia and Azerbaijan has also tied elevated patriotic sentiments to wider public support for the government, reducing resentment over economic consequences of COVID-19.

While the pandemic has disrupted electoral schedules, several polls are



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still slated to take place by year-end. Criticism over the government's handling of the crisis contributed to the high level of voter mobilisation in the 9 August presidential election in **Belarus**. Since the poll, well-attended protests demanding President Aleksandr Lukashenko's resignation have continued countrywide, with no political solution in sight. In **Kyrgyzstan**, discontent at the government's response to the pandemic in the run-up to parliamentary elections on 4 October made the opposition parties' mediocre results implausible. The reports of vote buying by government-linked parties have credence given the severe economic impact of the pandemic. Subsequent election-related unrest has created political uncertainty and the prospect of further elections in the coming months.

In **Russia**, President Vladimir Putin was forced to postpone a nationwide vote on constitutional amendments scheduled for April, just as opposition groups were planning protests to oppose the changes. The vote that eventually took place on 1 July was held using alternative voting methods introduced specifically because of COVID-19. The methods may also be deployed in the 2021 parliamentary elections, despite having been criticised by independent observers as conducive to fraud, auguring further protests.

The most competitive upcoming elections will be in **Georgia** and **Ukraine**. In **Ukraine**, disagreements over COVID-19-related measures prompted some regional governors to openly defy guidance from the central government.

The 25 October local elections are set to be more competitive than initially anticipated as the ruling Servant of the People party is weakened due to its association with unpopular pandemic-related restrictions. Although no major election-related unrest is expected, heightened tensions, particularly those between far-right and nationalist activists and parties perceived to be pro-Russia, are likely to result in further incidents of localised clashes between rival supporters and low-level attacks on party members and offices.

Parliamentary polls in **Georgia** will be held on 31 October using an updated voting system adopted in June as a compromise between the ruling Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (KO-DS) party and the opposition. The situation in **Georgia** is somewhat unique in the region as the KO-DS has come out stronger than it did prior to COVID-19 due to the fact that the country has fared better in handling the pandemic than any other post-Soviet state.

KEY JUDGEMENTS

- Anti-government unrest will increase in countries where the crisis exacerbates socio-economic grievances and highlights perceived shortcomings in governance, such as Israel.
- The pandemic is also presenting some governments, including those in Algeria, Egypt and Turkey, with an opportunity to use sweeping health emergency measures to stifle domestic opposition.
- Akin to the wider Middle East region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will continue to face economic challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and low global oil prices. This will prompt a stronger push for state-led initiatives to localise the private sector, fuelling occasional and limited labour-related demonstrations.

Across the Middle East, while several anti-government protest movements were firmly in motion prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the pandemic has also exacerbated socio-economic grievances and highlighted shortcomings in governance.

Protests in **Israel** against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have thus grown in recent months. Participants have been galvanised by the government's perceived mishandling of the country's COVID-19 response, the economic fallout of strict containment measures, a precarious domestic political situation and Netanyahu's ongoing trial on corruption charges. Protesters in Jerusalem have repeatedly rallied outside the prime minister's residence in the Rehavia area. Clashes with the security forces, as well as counter-demonstrations by far-right supporters, have also occurred.

The COVID-19 crisis is also presenting some governments with an opportunity to crack down on wider dissent by stifling criticism of their handling of the pandemic, through restrictions imposed on social media and domestic media activities.

In **Algeria**, restrictions to freedom of speech had already been implemented since President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's election, in December 2019, as his administration struggled to establish its legitimacy following the February 2019 ouster of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika (in office 1999-2019). The parliament in April passed a revision to the criminal code making the circulation of information that threatens national

unity or public order an offence punishable with prison time or fines.

Tensions are likely to increase towards the end of 2020, particularly around the government's decision to hold a constitutional referendum on 1 November, amid the pandemic. We expect further mass arrests among activists' ranks, which is liable to prompt the return of large-scale street protests in major cities.

In **Egypt**, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has also moved to further curb domestic criticism amid the COVID-19 crisis. The Egyptian Medical Syndicate is facing increased scrutiny and arrests over its disapproval of the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has entailed allegations of unsafe working conditions and shortages of medical supplies. The authorities have also sought to curb negative domestic media coverage by arresting journalists critical of the government's pandemic response. Such measures will add to popular frustrations over shrinking space for dissent.

In **Turkey**, the authorities have pursued their efforts to stifle domestic criticism and sideline opposition groups. Hundreds of people were arrested over social media posts reportedly criticising the government's handling of the pandemic. However, opposition parties will find it



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difficult to overcome their differences and challenge Erdogan’s leadership, as COVID-19 is used as a pretext to ban political gatherings and further reduce the space available in public discourse for criticism of the regime’s increasing centralisation of authority.

In **Iraq**, the COVID-19 crisis and persistently low global oil prices will pose key challenges to Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s government as they highlight the chronic underinvestment in the country’s public services and infrastructure and exacerbate long-standing grievances fuelling anti-government demonstrations. The Kurdistan Region will also face sporadic bouts of social unrest over the coming months motivated by similar concerns, particularly around the impact of COVID-19-linked measures on livelihoods.

As the pandemic continues and **tensions between the US and Iran remain heightened**, pro-Iranian armed groups are stepping up their attacks against US military and diplomatic interests in federal Iraq.

Elsewhere in the region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) – are all facing economic challenges as a result of COVID-19 and low global oil prices. All GCC countries have already introduced state-led programmes aimed at achieving a more equitable balance between the employment of local and foreign nationals in the private sector. These initiatives – including increased quotas for local nationals – will now gain greater traction as governments seek to tackle high levels of youth unemployment and reduce budgetary pressures, particularly in **Saudi Arabia, Kuwait** and **Oman**.

Despite these economic challenges, the risk of widespread unrest across the GCC will remain low. Demonstrations staged by migrant workers over labour-related grievances will remain primarily confined to company-run accommodation camps and pose limited risks to outsiders.

ADVISE



- Ensure that staff are fully briefed on prevailing risks, ideally having received itinerary- and profile-specific advice, before proceeding with any journeys.
- Employees should be well-educated on their organisation's security and medical triggers for a change of posture in the local environment, as well as trained on their responsibilities regarding incident response and crisis management procedures.

ASSIST



- In the event of an escalation, managers should be able to identify the locations of employees, communicate with them effectively and assist them in accessing appropriate medical or security assistance. Create a communications and emergency response plan for the event that telecommunications services are blocked during major unrest or election-related disruption. Test plans regularly.
- Carefully consider available support networks for journeys, especially to traditionally HIGH travel risk locations and locations with pronounced COVID-19-related challenges. In such countries or zones, additional precautions may be warranted, such as arranging for secure transport.

PLAN



- Ensure country-specific Business Continuity and Crisis Management Plans are updated, regularly tested and tailored to the local risk environment. Relocation and evacuation options should account for limitations posed by COVID-19-related restrictions. Planning should include scenarios that would influence flexible work or return-to-work policies once movement restrictions are fully lifted,

or, conversely, when pandemic-related restrictions are reinstated.

- In addition to business continuity plans and flexible working arrangements, organisations with sites or offices in or near the areas prone to protests, or/ and organisations that may be directly targeted in protests should review physical security measures as part of enhanced preparedness.

ASSESS



- Ensure that destination-specific assessments are carried out pre-travel and assess whether it is practical for staff to deploy to the country. As part of this, monitor the status of COVID-19-related restrictions in destination countries and the measures associated with each level or stage of risk-adjusted approaches. Consider the following factors:

movement restrictions and quarantine preventing or delaying travellers and international assignees from returning home.

- The availability of flights to and from the destination.
- The risk of travel disruption due to screening and quarantine measures locally and internationally.

- The risk of a surge in infections at the destination. An outbreak could occur at any time at the destination or transit location and could escalate rapidly.
- Access to quality medical care, the usual standard of local medical care, and the local health system's capability to manage a sudden surge in demand.
- The potential for a reinstatement of stricter measures at the destination as well as in the home location in the event of a surge in infections, including

- Maintain access to reliable, evaluated and timely information to effectively inform employee communication and business decision-making. Before dissemination to employees, information should be verified, given the tendency for sensationalism in the news and on social media platforms, to avoid spreading false information.
- Closely monitor country-level developments and, in particular specific indicators of a potential deterioration in the security environment.

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