

SAFEABROAD



SafeAbroad's

# 2024 ANNUAL SAFETY REPORT

FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

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## Themes in Global Safety & Security



# Themes in Global Safety & Security

**SafeAbroad Analysts have identified several distinct themes that each held a notable influence on international education programs throughout 2023.**

Over the past year, our team has monitored the myriad of risks that impacted the health, safety, and well-being of student travelers abroad. Since January, SafeAbroad Analysts have logged over 8,000 incidents spanning travel, security, protests, health, disasters, and weather across more than 100 countries. Through this comprehensive lens, our team crafted this year's Annual Safety Report for International Education, offering a guide for programs to navigate the risks and liabilities associated with international travel and education.

The following topics had a significant impact on education abroad this year and will likely continue to impact international education in the coming years:

- **Rise in Civil Engagement, Protests, and Unrest | A global surge in protests and civil unrest made headlines around the world.** From the Paris Pension Reform Protests to the Israeli Judicial Reform movement, many students abroad found themselves amidst socio-political upheavals and nationwide demonstrations.<sup>1</sup> Given recent geopolitical tensions, particularly surrounding the Israel-Gaza War, such protests and demonstrations will undoubtedly continue throughout the coming year.<sup>2</sup>
- **Weather and Natural Disasters | Devastating storms and natural disasters caused widespread disruption in cities and countries worldwide.** Morocco's September 8 earthquake was the deadliest earthquake of the century,<sup>3</sup> killing thousands. Typhoon season ripped through the Pacific, and wildfires blazed across Canada and Europe for months as the Earth experienced its hottest year on record.<sup>4</sup> Given the ever-growing role of climate change in shaping regional weather patterns, students abroad should continue to anticipate harsh weather conditions in the coming years.
- **Geopolitical Conflicts and Terrorist Attacks | Over the past year, tensions and conflicts between countries with historical disputes have resurged, notably in Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, and Taiwan and mainland China.** The renewal of war between Israel and Hamas has inspired related terrorist threats and civil unrest throughout Europe and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> Ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine, as well as Taiwan and China, have also sparked protests and other demonstrations, causing disruptions worldwide.
- **Increased Crime | As travel has returned to pre-pandemic levels, so have crime rates, leading many travelers to experience elevated instances of petty theft, scams, or even violent crimes in many destinations.**<sup>6</sup> This trend is expected to continue, if not increase, in 2024, particularly in areas impacted by economic hardship and increasing costs of living that drive opportunistic crime.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20230226-what-comes-next-in-france-s-fight-over-pension-reform>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/about-100000-protesters-join-pro-palestinian-march-through-london-2023-10-21/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/151847/devastation-in-morocco>

<sup>4</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/151985/tracking-canadas-extreme-2023-fire-season>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/06/1210831466/death-toll-gaza-israel-hamas-conflict>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2023/>

Throughout this report, our analysts highlight several critical aspects of student safety abroad. Reviewing the significant events that shaped 2023, we've provided a comprehensive overview of the ever-evolving risk landscape. Looking ahead, our focus extends to 2024, outlining emerging trends and potential risks that may impact international education programs around the world. Finally, we present a compilation of the most significant updates to travel risk management policies and recommendations within the past year. Together, these analyses aim to equip institutions with the knowledge and tools to foster secure and enriching global educational experiences for all students.

## Key Takeaways

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- 1. Major instances of civil unrest throughout the world, severe natural disasters, and the renewal of political violence marked 2023 and are likely to extend into the new year.** Major protest and civil unrest movements in countries like France, Peru, and Kenya created widespread disruptions while accompanying demonstrations upended transit and healthcare sectors throughout the year. Natural disasters, including earthquakes in Turkey and Morocco, as well as an especially severe typhoon season in the Pacific, killed or displaced thousands of people. Political violence, including contested elections in Brazil, political assassinations in Ecuador, and the renewal of conflict in Israel, created significant regional tensions and widespread travel disruptions.
- 2. International conflicts, the increasingly severe effects of climate change, and worsening political strife in many countries will pose the greatest risks to travelers in 2024.** Ongoing international conflicts and geopolitical tensions, such as those surrounding Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, continuing into the new year will pose a high risk to student travelers abroad. Moreover, 2024 will be a major election year in many countries, leading to widespread political and civic engagement expected to have a moderate impact on student travelers. Additionally, severe weather, natural disasters, and environmental threats are expected to pose significant risks to student travelers through more frequent and severe storms, wildfires, and other destructive natural phenomena.
- 3. Over the past year, developments such as ISO 31030 and advancements in artificial intelligence have proven transformative in guiding travel risk management through a post-COVID world.** The years following the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a notable and commendable emphasis on enhancing mental health resources for students abroad. ISO 31030, put forward by the International Standards Organization, now serves as the new universal standard for travel risk management. Moreover, the rise of AI and other cutting-edge technologies, such as ChatGPT, fostered a transformative shift within the landscape of risk management.



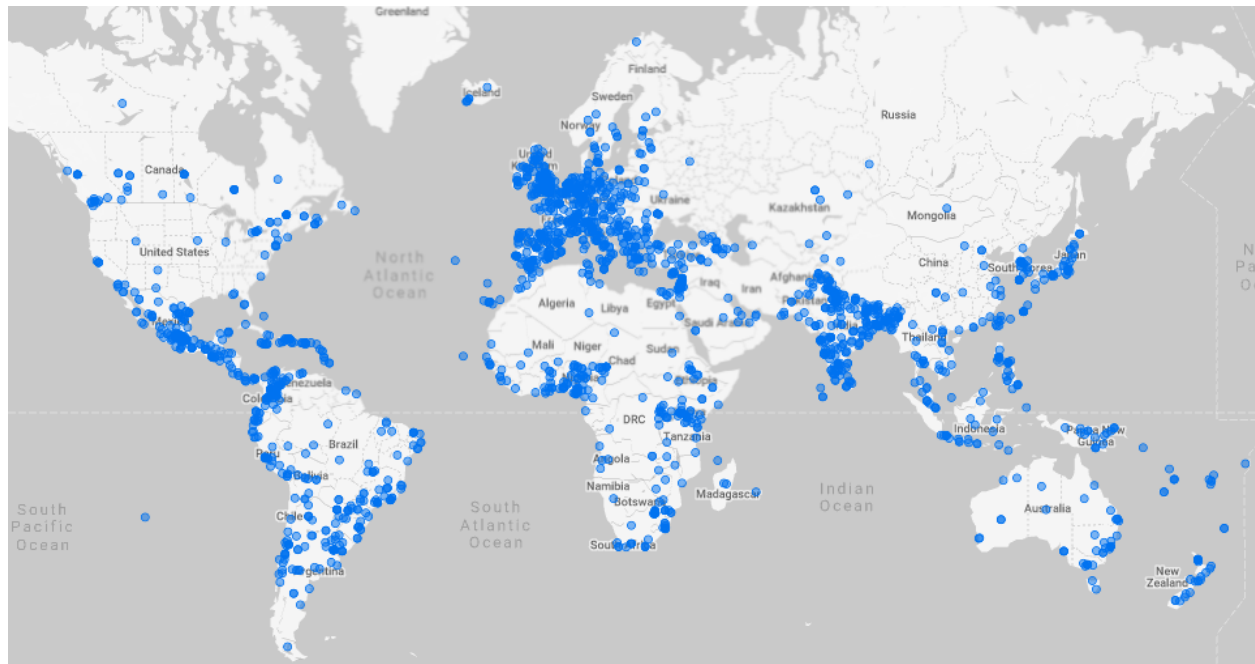
**Year in Review: 2023**



## Year in Review: 2023

Travelers throughout 2023 experienced significant disruptions to international travel across Europe, the Americas, Asia & the Pacific, and Africa & the Middle East, largely in the form of security, travel, weather, disaster, protest, and health risks.

From January 1 to December 1, SafeAbroad analysts reported 8,344 incidents in high-priority study-abroad locations, most of which were concentrated in Western Europe. The following map represents a city or town where an incident of concern happened in 2023. We outline the most relevant and impactful incidents for student travelers in the sections below.



## Europe

### In 2023, Europe experienced widespread protests, an upsurge in violence and terrorist attacks, and an unprecedented heatwave.

Civic engagement and unrest reached high levels as tensions flared over issues such as pension reform, the Israel-Hamas conflict, immigration, as well as other political flashpoints that ignited protest movements across Europe. The growing impacts of climate change produced several instances of extreme weather in Europe, bringing about an especially severe season for wildfires.

- **A series of unruly protest movements took place throughout France, leading to thousands of arrests and widespread unrest across the country.** Beginning in January, opposition to proposed reforms to French government pensions and the national retirement age prompted widespread opposition and condemnation of the Macron government. By February, attendance at demonstrations was in the millions, with as many as 1.3 million people turning out in Paris on February 11.<sup>7</sup> Demonstrations and rioting continued into the summer, as activists blockaded major roadways and industries held nationwide strikes in opposition to the reform—including several major air traffic controllers' strikes that interrupted air travel across Europe.<sup>8</sup> Riots on May Day led to 291 arrests, and injuries to over one hundred police officers.<sup>9</sup> After President Macron Formally signed the bill into law in April, unrest briefly abated until June 27, when the police shooting of an Algerian-French teenager led to protests against police brutality.<sup>10</sup> Five nights of rioting, arson, looting, and clashes with police culminated in the arrests of over 3,400 activists by July 5.<sup>11</sup> The months of demonstrations caused widespread disruptions across air travel, public transit, essential services, and other sectors before calming in the late summer.
- **An unprecedented heatwave marked one of Europe's hottest summers on record, triggering uncontrolled wildfires across its southern regions.**<sup>12</sup> Greece, in particular, suffered a series of wildfires that killed twenty-eight people, with thousands more urged to evacuate.<sup>13</sup> Southern Italy, France, and Iberia also grappled with similar fire outbreaks, leading to evacuations of popular tourist destinations like Rhodes, Sardinia, and Majorca throughout the season.
- **The number of migrants and refugees from conflict-stricken regions surged, notably from Ukraine and the Middle East.** Approximately 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees sought shelter in European countries this year, with the highest concentrations in Germany (1 million), Poland (968,000), and Czechia (368,000).<sup>14</sup> The ensuing debates over the refugee and migration crisis fueled the rise of far-right political groups across the continent, sparking notable unrest in several countries. In June, a spree of public Quran burnings in

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20230226-what-comes-next-in-france-s-fight-over-pension-reform>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sortiraparis.com/en/news/in-paris/articles/288405-pension-reform-here-is-the-route-of-the-demonstration-on-thursday-april-6>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65449777>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66038227>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.afar.com/magazine/paris-2023-pension-protests-what-travelers-to-france-should-know>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/world/europe-heatwave-2023>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ertnews.gr/featured/evros-allos-enas-metanastis-nekros-stis-floges-ki-enas-apo-pathologika-aitia-maxi-me-tis-anazopyroseis/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312584/ukrainian-refugees-by-country/>



Stockholm, Sweden, caused extreme backlash from Islamic countries and raised the country's security level for risk of terrorist attacks.<sup>15</sup> In late November, riots broke out in Dublin, Ireland, after an Algerian-born man who had been under a deportation order for several years stabbed three children and a caretaker at a primary school.<sup>16</sup> Similar riots and protests took place in countries across Europe throughout the year, leading to widespread destruction of property, hundreds of arrests, and further agitating the immigration debate continent-wide.<sup>17</sup>

- **Renewed hostilities between Israel and Hamas in October 2023 caused a surge in violent attacks and unrest in Europe linked to the “Day of Rage” on October 13, where Hamas encouraged supporters and sympathizers to carry out attacks and demonstrations around the world.** On October 13, a suspected Islamist attacked a school in Arras, France, killing one teacher and injuring three others.<sup>18</sup> The French government responded with a ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations and the deployment of more than 7,000 security personnel across the country. On October 16 in Brussels, Belgium, an ISIS-affiliated terrorist shot three Swedish tourists, killing two.<sup>19</sup> In addition to several other attacks and thousands of bomb threats, many major cities saw widespread and regular demonstrations denouncing the Israeli campaign in Gaza. On October 21, pro-Palestinian demonstrators numbering up to 100,000 marched through the streets of London, UK, and activists have sought to repeat the demonstration weekly since the conflict began.<sup>20</sup> Regular demonstrations and the continued risk of attacks continually caused significant disruptions across Europe in late 2023, a trend which will likely continue into 2024 as the Israel-Hamas conflict remains ongoing.

**On June 12, two American women were assaulted, with one killed, at Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany.** The two women, both recent graduates from Illinois College, met an American man at the castle, who convinced them to follow him on a more remote trail along the cliffs. According to police reports, the man attempted to sexually assault both women, leading to a struggle ending with both victims being pushed off the cliff. One woman died of her injuries in the hospital.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/article/sweden-denmark-quran-burnings.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/new-details-on-the-dublin-assailant/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/new-details-on-the-dublin-assailant/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-school-stabbing-heres-what-we-know-about-arras-attack-2023-10-13/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/International/brussels-shooter-killed-2-swedish-soccer-fans-act/story?id=104032665>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/about-100000-protesters-join-pro-palestinian-march-through-london-2023-10-21/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/american-charged-murder-attack-2-us-tourists-german-castle-rcn-a122392>

## The Americas

**Amidst a slow economic recovery from the pandemic, escalating political polarization, and constitutional crises, numerous nations across the Americas, including Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil, experienced profound political instability in 2023.**

Political instability across the region frequently manifested as widespread protest and demonstration movements, which occasionally turned violent. These bouts of both civil and violent unrest resulted in significant disruptions to public transportation and other essential services.

- **Ecuador experienced a significant political crisis beginning with former President Guillermo Lasso’s invocation of a constitutional “mutual death” clause, triggering new elections for both the presidency and the legislature.** The ensuing election season saw rampant unrest and political violence culminating with the assassination of Fernando Villavicencio, a popular anti-corruption candidate.<sup>22</sup> Villavicencio’s assassination transformed the electoral landscape in Ecuador, leading to the appointment of Daniel Noboa, a candidate with a stringent stance on crime.
- **In Peru, political unrest from late 2022 continued into 2023 as widespread demonstrations sought governmental reform and the resignation of President Dina Boluarte.** These demonstrations frequently turned violent, devolving into looting and clashes with police forces.<sup>23</sup> Hundreds of arrests and dozens of protest-related deaths were reported over months of widespread unrest.<sup>24</sup>
- **Following Brazil’s contentious elections in late 2022, the country’s new administration faced significant political turmoil in early 2023.** Outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro was hesitant to begin a transfer of power, neither conceding defeat nor congratulating his opponent, Lula da Silva. Following the election, Bolsonaro supporters took to the streets en masse, leading anti-government protests and requesting the military to stage a coup d’etat against the elected government.<sup>25</sup> On January 8, a week after President Lula was sworn in, protesting Bolsonaro supporters became unruly, devolving into riots in the capital, Brasilia. Significant destruction of property resulted in over 400 arrests, as well as the storming and temporary occupation of the Brazilian Supreme Court, Congressional Building, and Presidential Palace.<sup>26</sup>

**In 2023, Canada experienced an especially severe wildfire season, leading to continent-wide disruptions and air quality warnings throughout North America.** Massive wildfires burned from Quebec to British Columbia, totaling roughly 18.5 million hectares. Smoke from the fires prompted air-travel disruptions and air-quality warnings across the entire continent.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/08/10/ecuadorean-candidate-villavicencio-killed-at-campaign-event.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/18/americas/peru-protest-impunity-economy-intl-latam/index.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-64271036>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/protesters-storm-brazils-government-calling-for-military-takeover/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/protesters-storm-brazils-government-calling-for-military-takeover/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/151985/tracking-canadas-extreme-2023-fire-season>



## Asia & the Pacific

Throughout 2023, Asia & the Pacific experienced a surge in attacks and gun violence in historically safe destinations.

Japan and South Korea experienced elevated levels of violence and shootings, suggesting a return to pre-pandemic crime levels. Additionally, the region faced a series of natural disasters and weather events, which caused hundreds of deaths and significant travel disruptions.

- **Japan has experienced a steady return to pre-pandemic levels of crimes, with a notable spike in publicized violent incidents in 2023.** On May 25, a gunman opened fire on pedestrians in Nakano City, killing four civilians and leading to a standoff with police. The following day, a gang-related shooting took place at Tokyo's JR Machida Train Station, killing one person.<sup>28</sup> On October 31 in Toda, Japan, just outside Tokyo, a shooting occurred at the Toda Chuo General Hospital, leaving two individuals injured during a hostage situation.<sup>29</sup> Despite these three events, Japan is otherwise known for low levels of gun violence, typically seeing between 1–10 incidents of gun violence per year.
- **In August, South Korea saw an uncharacteristic series of attacks and threats in public spaces.** On August 3, an individual rammed a car into a shopping plaza in Seongnam. The assailant then exited the vehicle and began a stabbing spree, killing two and injuring thirteen before being apprehended. Two days later, a second stabbing took place at a high school in Daejeon, injuring one teacher.<sup>30</sup> Later in the same month, a series of bomb threats sent to universities and government buildings led to increased security nationwide.
- **On July 20, just hours before the opening ceremonies of the Women's World Cup in Auckland, New Zealand, a gunman opened fire at a construction site close to the stadium, killing two and wounding several more before local police killed the attacker in a shootout.** New Zealand and Australia jointly held the 2023 Women's World Cup, which became the largest of its kind to date; however, the incident led to heightened security at subsequent matches.<sup>31</sup> In addition to escalated security concerns following the shooting, the tournament brought about widespread travel disruptions across its host countries.

**Region-wide, the 2023 Pacific Typhoon season was severe, with fourteen tropical storms, ten typhoons, and six super typhoons impacting the region by September.** Typhoons Saola and Haikui resulted in nearly two million evacuations across both China and Taiwan.<sup>32</sup> In July, Typhoon Doksuri alone caused at least 130 deaths, injured nearly 300 people, and impacted thousands of other individuals, primarily in the Philippines and China.<sup>33</sup> In September, 47 deaths and at least 35 injuries were recorded in South Korea due to torrential rainfall.<sup>34</sup> These storms and other natural disasters across Asia and the Pacific had significant impacts on student travelers, largely in the form of travel delays and cancellations.

<sup>28</sup><https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/four-dead-suspect-arrested-rare-shooting-incident-japan-med-ia-2023-05-26/>

<sup>29</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/31/asia/japan-suspected-shooting-hospital-toda-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/03/south-korea-car-stabbing-attack-seongnam/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/19/1188825718/new-zealand-shooting-near-world-cup>

<sup>32</sup><https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/typhoon-saola-appears-to-only-lightly-damage-southern-china-coast-after-making-landfall>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/typhoon-doksuri-raging-storm-108mph-30574323>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/09/world/asia/typhoon-khanun-weather-south-korea.html>

## Africa & The Middle East

**In 2023, the Middle East faced a tumultuous year marked by political unrest, social upheaval, and natural disasters.**

Additionally, Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7 has triggered one of the deadliest wars the region has seen in decades. The conflict prompted region-wide unrest, which came on the heels of the Judicial Reform protest movement, which caused regular disruptions in Israel up to that point. The region also experienced two major earthquakes in Turkey and Morocco, which killed thousands and significantly affected millions more.

- **In mid-2023, unrest over proposed reforms to Israel's judicial system led to a bout of unrest and regular demonstrations across the country.** Hundreds of thousands regularly attended Saturday protests in Tel Aviv, with thousands more demonstrating across the country, and major labor unions carried out strikes in support of demonstrators.<sup>35</sup> Later in the year, demonstrations seemed likely to continue, or even intensify, until the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas shifted the national focus.
- **On October 7, the conflict between Israel and Hamas created worldwide disruptions, with drastic consequences for Israel and its neighboring countries.** Since the conflict began, over 10,000 have been killed in the heavy fighting.<sup>36</sup> Israel's borders with Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon closed, while several international airlines ceased operations in the country.<sup>37</sup> Neighboring countries have experienced spillover effects from the conflict as well. Hezbollah militants in southern Lebanon frequently exchanged fire with IDF forces in northern Israel.<sup>38</sup> The greater Middle East has seen large-scale, occasionally violent, demonstrations in support of Palestine and Gaza. In late October, Jordanian authorities forcibly dispersed several demonstrations attempting to storm the Israeli Embassy in Amman, as well as the nation's border with the West Bank.<sup>39</sup> Unrest and security concerns are likely to persist and create further travel disruptions into 2024 as the Israeli campaign in Gaza continues.
- **Egypt experienced a series of significant transportation disasters that impacted tourists.** In early June, an electrical short circuit led to a fire aboard a scuba diving boat off Egypt's Red Sea coastline, killing three British tourists sixteen miles north of Marsa Alam.<sup>40</sup> On October 28, thirty-two people died, and sixty-three others were injured in a multi-vehicle pile-up along the Cairo-Alexandria highway in Beheira, Egypt.<sup>41</sup> Reports indicate twenty-nine vehicles were involved in the crash, and at least twenty ambulances were dispatched. Many officials attribute the frequency of such disasters to a lack of standards and proper maintenance from the Egyptian government.

<sup>35</sup><https://apnews.com/article/israel-politics-justice-minister-judicial-overhaul-netanyahu-b93481650524a63c4e85199c0ea3fb4d>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/06/1210831466/death-toll-gaza-israel-hamas-conflict>

<sup>37</sup> <https://worldisraelnews.com/airlines-shut-down-most-flights-to-and-from-israel-after-rocket-hits-airport/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.barrons.com/news/israeli-strike-on-lebanon-kills-hezbollah-member-officials-65ff6a82>

<sup>39</sup><https://www.voanews.com/a/analysis-mass-protests-rock-jordan-key-us-ally-in-mideast/7317716.html>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/11/british-tourists-missing-after-boat-fire-in-egypts-red-sea>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67248455>



- **Kenya experienced a wave of unrest amidst the country's worsening cost-of-living crisis.** Political opposition groups held weekly rallies in Nairobi and other major cities, demanding action from the Ruto government. These weekly protests saw hundreds of arrests, widespread vandalism, and dozens of deaths from clashes between demonstrators and security forces.<sup>42</sup>
- **Fuel, water, and electricity shortages impact on daily life in South Africa.** Water shortages were most dire in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. The frequency and length of power outages increased due to continued difficulties in power cuts and load shedding. Resource shortages also disrupted the agriculture, automobile, and energy sectors, leading to price spikes.<sup>43</sup> Unrest over these conditions has also led to frequent protests, impacting travel throughout the country, particularly in Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg, and other major cities.

**The Middle East saw two devastating earthquakes in 2023, killing thousands of people and leaving widespread destruction in their wake.** On February 6, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Turkey, killing nearly 60,000 people, including three Americans, and rendering over 1.5 million individuals homeless. The catastrophe affected more than 14 million people in its radius, marking it as the region's deadliest natural disaster in modern history.<sup>44</sup> Later in the year, on September 8, Morocco experienced its strongest earthquake in over a century, registering 6.8 magnitudes just outside Marrakech.<sup>45</sup> Nearly 3,000 people died, and roughly 5,500 others were injured in the destruction, making it North Africa's deadliest earthquake since 1960.<sup>46</sup> According to the United Nations, more than 300,000 people were directly affected in the earthquake's epicenter.<sup>47</sup> Some 60,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, leaving 500,000 citizens displaced.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup><https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/20/africa/kenya-cost-of-living-protests-explainer-intl/index.html>

<sup>43</sup><https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/mi/research-analysis/resource-shortages-likely-to-disrupt-critical-supply-chains-in.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://abc7news.com/2023-turkey-earthquake-syria-death-toll-americans-killed/12787884/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/151847/devastation-in-morocco>

<sup>46</sup><https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/morocco-earthquake-death-toll-passes-2800-survivors-camp-outdoors-2023-09-11/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2023-morocco-earthquake/>

<sup>48</sup><https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/9/18/photos-the-earthquake-in-morocco-that-shattered-thousands-of-lives>





**The Year Ahead: 2024 Forecast**



# The Year Ahead: 2024 Forecast

**The responses of national governments and international organizations to ongoing crises and regional trends will shape student safety in 2024.**

International conflicts, environmental crises, migration, and the growing threat of cybercrime will push governments to their limits as they race to establish new legislation and international partnerships. Meanwhile, upcoming contentious elections, particularly in countries with energy and costs-of-living crises, may lead to increased civil demonstrations and political activism. Equally concerning trends, such as democratic backsliding and declining academic freedoms, will also shape global attitudes toward international travelers and students abroad.

## International Conflicts and Geopolitical Tensions

**Ongoing international conflicts and geopolitical tensions continuing into the new year will pose a high risk to student travelers abroad.**

The Israel-Hamas war, Russo-Ukraine war, and ongoing tensions between Taiwan and mainland China will likely lead to increased demonstrations, as well as worsened diplomatic relations and provocative military exercises in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the South China Sea.

- **The Israel-Hamas war is likely to continue for several months, increasing overall regional tensions as well as the risk of terrorist attacks and protests across Europe and the Middle East.** While the risk of the conflict spilling over into a more regional war has diminished, the threat of additional terrorist attacks in Europe and the Middle East remains high, particularly surrounding upcoming Jewish celebrations such as Hanukkah from December 7–15, Purim from March 23–24, and Passover from April 22–30. Additionally, pro-Palestinian demonstrations are expected to continue worldwide for the duration of the conflict, likely leading to increased security measures in urban centers, traffic disruptions surrounding protests, and clashes between protesters and police.
- **Student travelers should anticipate intermittent disruptions across Europe in 2024 due to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.** As the war continues into its second year, war fatigue, new bids for NATO membership, and military exercises will likely spark protests and demonstrations throughout the European Union. While the risk of NATO joining the war remains low, Sweden's bid for membership and Ukraine's continued request for consideration has heightened tensions between the Russian Federation and the NATO alliance. In response, NATO has planned military exercises in Poland and the Baltics throughout the Spring, which will likely receive a poor reception from the continually war-fatigued civilian population in Europe.<sup>49</sup> Anti-war protests will likely continue in the coming months, resulting in widespread disruptions and increased clashes between protesters and police in urban areas.
- **Tensions between Taiwan and mainland China will remain high in 2024, particularly following the Taiwanese election in January 2024, and pose an elevated risk to student travelers abroad.** The election outcome will play a crucial role in shaping Taiwan's foreign policy, potentially influencing its stance toward mainland China. This situation poses an

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_218279.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_218279.htm?selectedLocale=en)

elevated risk to student travelers abroad, as diplomatic maneuvers, political propaganda, and provocative military exercises will likely surround the period surrounding the election. In a worst-case scenario, the tensions could escalate into a full-scale invasion of the island or the imposition of a naval blockade, posing a significant threat to the safety of students studying in Taiwan. While this is incredibly unlikely, student travelers should monitor ongoing geopolitical tensions, stay informed about travel advisories, and follow any guidance provided by relevant authorities to ensure their safety and well-being.

## Weather, Natural Disasters, and Environmental Threats

### Weather, natural disasters, and environmental threats are expected to pose significant risks to student travelers in 2024.

The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, floods, and wildfires, may disrupt travel plans and compromise the safety of students in affected regions. Additionally, increased global temperatures will increase the risk of wildfires, heat-related health conditions, and insect-borne diseases.

- **Recent meteorological forecasts anticipate 2024 will be the hottest year on record, increasing risks of wildfires and heat-related health conditions.** The El Niño season, which began earlier than usual in 2023, will likely last into June next year, leading to higher-than-average temperatures and increased risks of wildfires.<sup>50</sup> As temperatures soar, the likelihood of heatstroke, sunburn, and dehydration will become more pronounced, posing a significant risk to student travelers.
- **Climate change and rising global temperatures are anticipated to increase the frequency and intensity of storms and other natural disasters, particularly hurricanes, cyclones, and tornadoes.** The heightened probability of storms may lead to travel delays and cancellations, disrupting students' itineraries and plans. Furthermore, the increased rainfall may give rise to associated flooding, posing an elevated threat to students residing or traveling in regions with underdeveloped infrastructure or inadequate water filtration systems.
- **Increased global temperatures are also expected to expand the geographical reach of insect-borne diseases and pose additional health risks to travelers in 2024.** Recent years have seen ticks and mosquitoes extend their range, facilitating the spread of insect-borne diseases such as Zika, Lyme disease, malaria, and dengue fever.<sup>51</sup> Students planning to travel should closely monitor recommendations from health authorities such as the CDC for any necessary vaccinations or precautions to reduce the risk of transmission while abroad.

<sup>50</sup><https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/el-nio-conditions-continue-through-winter-us-forecaster-2023-09-14/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9874214/>

## Elections and Political Turmoil

**2024 will be a major election year in many destinations, leading to widespread political and civic engagement expected to have a moderate impact on student travelers.**

In many countries, the upcoming elections are likely to be contentious, driven by controversial policies, foreign policy decisions, and ongoing cost-of-living crises. These issues will likely lead to widespread protests and demonstrations in urban areas in the coming months.

- **Elections for the European Parliament are set to take place from June 6–9, likely resulting in protests on key issues such as immigration, the wars in Ukraine and Israel, and climate change.** While European capitals routinely experience demonstrations on these topics, the frequency and scale of protests are expected to increase in the lead-up to the election, resulting in widespread travel delays and elevated security deployments.<sup>52</sup>
- **South Africa's upcoming election will likely be affected by the continued decline of the ANC, the country's primary political party, leading to widespread protests.** Key issues such as high unemployment, frequent power outages, and increasing crime rates are expected to dominate the election, fostering a polarizing campaign atmosphere and increasing political tensions.<sup>53</sup> The combination of these factors is likely to catalyze disruptive demonstrations nationwide.
- **Mexico's June 2 election has the potential to be highly controversial amid a trend of democratic backsliding and the erosion of the National Electoral Institute in recent years.** Questionable campaign tactics, such as the release of rival politician Xochitl Galvez's tax returns and the use of state addresses to discredit her, have been reported in the runoff against Claudia Sheinbaum.<sup>54</sup> Widespread demonstrations are expected in the coming months, particularly in Mexico City and nearby political centers.
- **Expect political and social demonstrations across India in the leadup to the General Election in April or May.** In recent months, issues such as caste discrimination have become increasingly controversial, leading to protests and demonstrations in urban centers. These demonstrations are expected to continue, especially as a coalition of more than thirty-eight political parties has agreed to jointly contest Prime Minister Narendra Modi's position should they receive more seats in the election.<sup>55</sup>
- **In addition to internal political issues, many countries will face additional cost-of-living crises in 2024, driven by the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and overall economic uncertainty.** Despite a decrease in inflation rates, rising energy costs and supply chain issues have led to significant strikes and other demonstrations as wages failed to keep pace with everyday expenses.<sup>56</sup> Should economic uncertainty persist, many countries will see intensified industrial action, particularly in the transit and hospitality sectors.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.eiu.com/n/europe-elections-to-watch-in-2024/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/9/dream-or-mirage-can-south-africas-white-led-opposition-win-in-2024>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/presidential-elections-and-fragmenting-political-landscape-mexico>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/modi-s-rivals-amplify-caste-divide-in-bid-to-win-india-elections-1.2005717>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/global-cost-living-crisis-reaches-breaking-point-1792554>



## Declining Academic Freedoms

Recent policies in popular study-abroad destinations such as Hungary, the United Kingdom, Poland, India, and China show a worldwide decline in academic freedoms, posing a threat to the free speech and academic research of students abroad.

According to a study by V-Dem, more than twenty-two countries experienced a degradation of academic freedom in 2023.<sup>57</sup> This trend will likely continue in 2024, especially in the lead-up to tense election cycles in Europe and Asia.

- **In the United Kingdom and other European nations, censorship and other academic restrictions will likely increase in 2024 following heated debates on topics such as the LGBTQ+ community and the Israel-Palestine conflict.** In recent years, universities harshly censored movements and individuals the general student body at large views as harmful or hateful, such as anti-trans views or pro-Palestinian activism.<sup>58</sup> Despite new laws mandating universities to uphold freedom of speech, the trend of restrictive measures is likely to persist, posing challenges to open academic expression on campuses.<sup>59</sup>
- **In 2024, India will likely see additional censorship and crackdowns from the state, particularly at public universities.** Recent incidents, such as the arrests of students for screening a banned documentary and the detention of university officials during a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highlight the government's tightening grip on academic freedom.<sup>60</sup> As the election approaches later in the year, this censorship is likely to intensify, posing a potential risk to international students inadvertently violating content laws.

## The Olympics

Paris, France, will host the 2024 Olympics from July 26 to August 11, which will cause heavy crowds, travel disruptions, an increase in petty crimes, and more frequent protests.

During the games, more than 15 million travelers are expected to visit Paris. The influx of travelers will lead to even more crowded popular landmarks, disruptions in public transportation, and an elevated likelihood of pickpocketing and petty crimes.<sup>61</sup>

- **Expect increased security in the lead-up to and during the games to prevent potential terrorist attacks.**<sup>62</sup> Given the global visibility of the games, they may become a target for extremist groups aiming to make a statement about controversial topics such as the Israel-Hamas war. French authorities are likely to implement stringent security measures, including increased police presence, heightened surveillance, and thorough screening processes to mitigate the risk of terrorist threats.

<sup>57</sup> [https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic\\_Freedom\\_Index\\_Update.pdf](https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-67033191>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-67033191>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2023/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2023/nov/07/what-travelers-should-know-about-the-paris-2024-ol/>

<sup>62</sup>

<https://www.reuters.com/sports/terrorism-cyber-attacks-main-paris-2024-threats-security-plan-finalised-2023-11-23/>

- **Given the presence of high-profile individuals and politicians at the games, the Olympics will likely be the target of widespread protests and demonstrations.** Activists from various causes may leverage the heightened international attention to voice their concerns, leading to an increased likelihood of public gatherings and protests in Paris during the games. In particular, the International Olympic Committee has warned of expected anti-semitic protests in the weeks leading up to the games.<sup>63</sup>
- **Tourists and student travelers will likely be at an increased risk for pick-pocketing, scams, and other forms of petty crimes.** With the surge in visitors in Paris, the increased tourist density at popular landmarks and attractions will likely attract more pick-pocketers seeking to capitalize on the expanded traffic.
- **The influx of visitors for the games and the construction of new stadiums will likely cause significant disruptions to public transportation in the coming months.** As Parisian officials accommodate the diverse stadiums and venues spread across the city, there will likely be significant adjustments and alterations to regular transportation schedules. This may lead to delays, rerouting of public transport, and potential congestion on roads.

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<sup>63</sup><https://www.dailysabah.com/sports/ioc-warns-protests-at-paris-2024-games-amid-ongoing-gaza-conflict/news>





## Enhancing Student Safety Abroad



# Enhancing Student Safety Abroad

**2024 will combine the successes, challenges, and failures of 2023 with its own unique risks; however, the recent strides in international standards, artificial intelligence, and other technologies, coupled with an enhanced emphasis on mental health, may increase overall travel risk management efforts.**

Predicting the time and location of incidents is not always easy or, in some cases, feasible at all. Significant events often occur in areas deemed safe for international travel, and even commonplace occurrences such as transportation strikes can disproportionately impact student travelers. Nevertheless, universities can leverage advancements in travel risk management policies and recommendations to offer the most targeted and specific advice for their travelers.

## Advances in Travel Risk Management

**Over the past several years, there has been a notable progression of travel risk management policies and recommendations, both in the international education community and beyond.**

The following developments underscore the resilience and adaptability of the international education community, which has swiftly embraced innovative approaches in the years after the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **ISO 31030, put forward by the International Standards Organization, is the new universal standard for travel risk management.**<sup>64</sup> ISO 31030 distinguishes itself from previous guidelines by providing a comprehensive and structured approach to travel risk management, encompassing policy development, program implementation, threat identification, opportunities and strengths analysis, risk assessment, and the strategic implementation of mitigation measures. While not developed specifically for international education, this guide offers a robust foundational scope for the establishment of travel risk management policies and the assessment of existing ones. To further enhance these recommendations, SafeAbroad has curated a comprehensive [Travel Risk Management Handbook for International Education](#). Drawing from the best practices observed in universities across the country, this handbook offers invaluable insights for the creation, execution, and assessment of international education programs, enriching the safety and well-being of students and staff alike.
- **In the past year, the landscape of risk management has witnessed a transformative shift with the rise of AI and other cutting-edge technologies, exemplified by innovations such as ChatGPT.** These advanced tools have significantly augmented traditional approaches and human capabilities, particularly in the analysis of extensive data sets. Their integration has proven instrumental in the efficient tracking and evaluation of data trends, providing organizations with invaluable insights to bolster their risk management strategies. As technology continues to evolve, these advancements hold the potential to further revolutionize the field, ensuring a more dynamic and adaptive approach to addressing emerging challenges in travel risk management.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/54204.html>

- **In the years following the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable and commendable emphasis on enhancing mental health resources for students, both domestically and internationally.** The collective efforts within the industry are still a work in progress, but there has been a discernible uptick in workshops and training initiatives addressing mental health concerns. Looking ahead, at SafeAbroad, we aspire to witness a more comprehensive approach to Traveler Wellness. We advocate for a holistic definition that encompasses mental health alongside other crucial pillars such as physical health, social wellness, and financial well-being. By integrating these dimensions, we aim to foster a more inclusive and robust framework for addressing the diverse needs of travelers in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

## Recommendations for Student Travelers

**Studying abroad can be a transformative and enriching experience, but it also comes with its own set of challenges and risks.**

With proper training, preparedness, and practical safety precautions, travelers can navigate these risks confidently.

The following recommendations may help mitigate the risks of traveling abroad:

- Travelers should be vigilant and aware of their surroundings and fully comply with local laws and regulations.
- Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) and check the U.S. State Department and Embassy websites for advisories to mitigate the risks of unpreparedness.
- To avoid being targeted for petty crimes and scams, travelers should be aware of their surroundings, limit displays of wealth, and avoid traveling alone.
- Monitor local news for forecasted weather and upcoming demonstrations that may cause travel disruptions.
- Avoid accepting drinks from strangers at bars and clubs, and be extra cautious when traveling at night.
- Familiarize yourself with your school's health insurance policies, obtain a supply of essential medications, and check with the CDC for important vaccinations.
- Be aware of the roles that race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and religion all have within a specific country, as travelers may face discrimination in certain cultures based on their personal identity.
- Make note of the locations and availability of essential services such as U.S. Embassies, hospitals, and clinics. Anticipate more frequent petty crime around local landmarks.
- Travelers should inform program managers about all independent excursions and travel in groups whenever possible. Secure safe means of transportation and accommodations prior to departure.
- Contact emergency services, your program manager, or the closest embassy or consulate in case of an emergency.

