



Caracas, 2019

Precautionary measures and behaviour in crisis situations

Introduction/general remarks

One of the standard duties of an embassy or consulate is to draw attention to potential threats and corresponding precautionary measures. This document should not be regarded as a reaction to changes in the security situation, but rather as a source of information and advice concerning generally necessary precautions. In the event of any specific changes in the security situation, you will receive details in a separate communication.

[Depiction of potential threats: political crises, major accidents, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, epidemics]

On the DFA travel advice page (www.eda.admin.ch > [Reisehinweise](#)) you will find a current assessment of the security situation in each country. Should you have any questions relating to security, please do not hesitate to contact your embassy or consulate.

The brochure "Wenn einer eine Reise tut..." (When travelling) also contains interesting information concerning journeys abroad under www.eda.admin.ch > [Reisehinweise](#) > [Tipps vor der Reise](#). The above-mentioned web sites also contain a variety of other useful documents and information sheets.

Your embassy/consulate has contact people ready who will try to keep contact with Swiss nationals in the event of a crisis.

In the case of a crisis, your embassy/consulate only has limited means of helping you. For this reason it is important that you assume responsibility for your own safety and take appropriate precautions.

1. Precautionary measures

The following items should always be kept close at hand in case a crisis should occur:

- Valid passport/ID (obtaining a new passport can take up to 40 days), plus (where applicable) driver's licence and vehicle papers, residence permit and exit visa, valid entry visa, vaccination certificate for country of destination, and any other important documents
- Cash and foreign currency reserves, credit cards, bank cards
- List of important phone numbers and other details (relatives and friends, embassy/consulate and contact person, police, fire brigade, ambulance service, doctor, numbers of your passport, bank account(s), credit cards, social insurance, other insurance policies, blood group, etc.)
- Emergency supplies of drinking water, foodstuffs (possibly a portable cooker), fuel and any medication you depend on
- Portable first-aid kit, including antibiotics and painkillers
- Battery-operated (short-wave) radio, flashlight plus spare batteries
- Mobile phone, fully charged spare battery or charger that does not require mains power supply, plus adequate call credit
- Fire extinguisher
- This information sheet

You can minimise the risk of damage or losses by taking certain precautions:

- Have your house and its installations and household systems inspected for safety (resistance to earthquakes, fire, flooding and storms), and be sure to install smoke detectors/fire alarms.
- Ensure that all walls, doors and windows are properly burglar-proofed and if necessary hire the services of a security firm.
- Pre-arrange a meeting place with your family to be used in case access to your house should be cut off.
- Find out about escape routes to the border, the nearest shelter and the nearest assembly area.
- Make sure you have all necessary vaccinations.
- Plan for the possibility that you will have to leave pets behind in case of evacuation.

- Find out about other safety precautions (e.g. www.svv.ch > **consumer info**, www.bag.admin.ch, www.seismo.ethz.ch, www.who.int, www.fema.gov, www.travel.state.gov/travel, www.gfz-potsdam.de, www.safecanada.ca > **family and home safety**, www.ready.gov).
- Subscribe to an SMS alerts service (e.g. www.tsunami-alarm-system.com).

Crises can give rise to major material losses, so be sure to take the necessary precautions:

- Soliswiss insurance against loss of means of existence due to political crises
- Building and contents insurance including disaster cover (be sure to frequently update the inventory of contents!)
- Health, accident and/or travel insurance, including cover for medical treatment abroad and repatriation, and/or membership of REGA rescue service (www.rega.ch)
- Keep copies of important documents (passports, insurance policies, contracts, inventories, pension card, CV, etc.) in a safe place, e.g. with relatives in Switzerland

It is also advisable to:

- Take out life insurance
- Grant power of attorney to your spouse or partner
- Have your will kept in a safe place (e.g. deposited at the embassy/consulate or with a solicitor in Switzerland)

Notify the embassy/consulate about changes of address and phone numbers (including mobile phones), e-mail addresses, etc., so that you can be contacted without delay in case of an emergency.

2. Behaviour in the event of an impending crisis

When the first signs of a developing crisis become apparent, ensure that you have taken all necessary precautionary measures. Notify the embassy/consulate about any visitors arriving from Switzerland, or ask them to register on itineris Online Registration of the FDFA. You should also notify the latter about any temporary periods of absence from the country.

Crises can escalate very rapidly, with the result that escape routes may be blocked and (safe) organised departure may become impossible. If the security situation grows increasingly hazardous, wherever possible it is best to make your own way out of the country while this is still possible and commercial transport is available. Please note that depending on the situation on the ground, the possibilities for the Swiss representation in [xxx] to help you in the event of a crisis may be limited or – in the worst case – not exist at all.

Wherever possible, the embassy/consulate will keep you informed about the development of the situation by issuing circulars, but it is unable to guarantee your safety. In a crisis, communication networks often break down, and this means you yourself are responsible for any decision you may make to stay in the country or leave it, and you also have to bear the associated costs and risks yourself. But be sure to notify the embassy or consulate about your intentions and any absences from your place of residence during a crisis.

3. Behaviour in a crisis situation

- Stay up to date by watching the TV, listening to the radio (recommended stations and their frequencies) and using the internet (recommended sites). Try to anticipate possible unusual situations and prepare for them, including your family members. Don't panic and don't pay attention to every rumour you hear.
- Make sure you always have a list of emergency numbers with you (police, ambulance service, fire brigade, etc.).
- Obey instructions given by the security forces immediately and without complaining.
- Never put up any resistance to armed persons. Avoid any kind of provocative act (sudden movements, even making eye contact or staring, political issues) that may be used as a pretext to harm you and others.
- Always help other people unless this would put you in danger yourself.
- Be discreet and avoid routines in general (leaving the house at the same time every day, using the same route, etc.).
- Maintain contact with the Swiss representation or your liaison officer. General information (travel advice, for example) is published on the representation's website (www.eda.admin.ch/pays).
- Maintain contact with your family and friends in Switzerland who are concerned about you.

Riots and unrest:

- Make sure you can access accurate information when needed (such as SMS alerts, etc.).

- Do not leave your house, office or hotel; close all doors and windows. If you are travelling, return home immediately. Use an alternative route if necessary, avoiding busy junctions. Do not let yourself be seen through windows. Stay inside in protected rooms where possible. Tell your family, friends and colleagues. Be patient: such situations usually calm down within one to three days.

Killing sprees and gunfire:

- Run, hide and protect yourself! Try to have an escape plan or emergency exit in mind at all times. If the attack lasts for several minutes, put your phone on silent and turn off the vibrating mode. Do not send any text messages unless you are sure you won't be taken by surprise. Obey the security forces.

Crime:

- Find out about the types of crime usually committed in the neighbourhood or town where you are living. Imagine being in such a situation and prepare for how you would react, putting up the least amount of resistance possible. Instruct your family members too. Be aware of the most dangerous areas in the town or city. Avoid walking around at night in general. Don't use cash machines on your own. Don't show your valuables.

Threats:

- If you are being threatened, try to evaluate and understand the situation. What is the issue? What are the possible repercussions? Try to deter the person threatening you or make them wait. Contact the police or local authorities as soon as you can.

Burglary:

- Burglaries can happen anywhere. Use barbed wire or video surveillance to deter burglars; put gravel in the yard so you can hear intruders moving about; keep a dog or other animals to warn you of intruders. Always lock your doors and windows using a key or padlock. Instruct your guards in what to do in the event of a burglary. Remember that losing material possessions in a burglary is nothing compared to losing peoples' lives, so do not put yourself at risk.

Kidnapping:

- If you are abducted, your best strategy is passive cooperation. Try to establish a connection with your kidnappers. If you are detained for a long period of time, put together a daily programme of physical and mental exercises for yourself. Try to make a mental note of everything you can without letting your kidnappers know. Do not try to run away. If you do, at least be sure that you will succeed and not put the other people detained with you at risk.

Corruption/fraud/scams:

- Be vigilant. If in doubt, consult someone who has more experience in that country than you. Never give in: this will only encourage the fraudsters to continue. Inform the local authorities.

Bombs and explosive devices:

- Find out about potential targets (political, diplomatic, etc.). Avoid places that may be the target of attacks as far as possible. In the event of an attack, try to run away and find somewhere to hide; help others around you without putting yourself in danger.

Road traffic accidents:

- Follow the local system and drive accordingly. Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition and keep a first-aid kit. Make sure your passengers wear a seatbelt. Keep within speed limits. If you are going on a long journey, share the driving and take regular breaks.
- In the event of an accident, respond as the situation warrants. A crowd of people may gather around your vehicle and start to harass you (in this case, drive away as fast as possible). In another situation, driving away may be breaking the law. If you run over someone's livestock, find out the (rough) cost to settle matters as quickly as possible. If you aren't sure what to do, ask the local authorities or someone with more experience of such cases than you.

Checkpoints:

- Checkpoints may be harmless enough. Comply with what the persons manning the checkpoint want. Generally speaking, the best approach is to remain patient. If the checkpoint seems suspicious, turn back at the appropriate moment and contact the local authorities.

Earthquakes:

- If you are inside a building, lie down underneath a solid piece of furniture (a solid table, bed, etc.) and hold onto it ('Drop, cover and hold on'). If you are outside, move away from buildings, lampposts, electricity pylons and large trees; do not stay on bridges or in tunnels. Be aware that aftershocks can sometimes cause more damage than the earthquake itself. If you are buried under rubble, do not make any sudden movements. Try to alert rescuers by tapping steadily on an object or by whistling. Do not shout unless you have no other choice, as by shouting you risk inhaling toxic dust.
- If the building is damaged or you suspect as much, switch off the heating, the gas supply and the circuit breaker. Consult a building technician before restoring everything.

Fire:

- Keep a fire extinguisher in the building. In the event of a fire in a building, keep your head close to the ground if the room is filled with smoke; do not open doors that seem hot and do not use the lifts.

Tidal waves/tsunamis:

- If you are at the coast and feel an earthquake or see the sea level rise or go down in an unusual way, get to an elevated area as quickly as possible or move away from the coast and do not return until it has been officially announced that there is no danger. Do not in any case return to the sea for at least an hour.

Access to health services:

- Make sure you know who to contact if you have an accident or fall ill. Keep a list of clinics or hospitals you would like to use if the need arises, including specialists (dentists, ophthalmologists, gynaecologists, paediatricians, etc.). Make sure you have their phone numbers and that there would be no language problems. Keep a list of chemists too.
- Know which ambulance service you want to use if and when necessary.

Epidemics:

- Follow recommendations issued by the local authorities, the Federal Office of Public Health (www.bag.admin.ch) and the World Health Organization (www.who.int). For useful information consult www.safetravel.ch.

Communication:

- Make sure that the Swiss representation can contact you if there is a problem. Tell the representation if you also have a Swiss phone number. This may be useful when local providers are overloaded, which can happen sometimes.
- If you have to leave your place of residence or the country, or have already done so, inform the representation without delay.

4. Departure of Swiss citizens organised by the FDFA

The FDFA can endeavour to organise departures for Swiss nationals if their lives are at risk, if there is no commercial transport for them to leave the crisis area by themselves, if the security situation in the country/region concerned allows for such a departure to be organised and carried out, and if the necessary logistical means are available.

Please note that depending on the situation on the ground, the possibilities for the Swiss representation in Caracas to help you in the event of a crisis may be limited or – in the worst case – not exist at all.

- As a rule, an organised departure is made from a designated assembly area (cf. situation plan of nearest and alternative assembly area).
- The embassy/consulate will inform you about any planned organised departure and, in the event of sustained danger, will try to give you instructions on the best way to reach the assembly area.
- If you should lose contact with the embassy/consulate or its designated contact, stay where you are for as long as possible if the situation is precarious. You should not proceed to the assembly area unless you are instructed to do so.
- The embassy/consulate will repeatedly try to contact you.
- When you proceed to the assembly area, you should take your passport and other important documents, plus cash, water and provisions for several days, a portable first-aid kit, sleeping bag or blankets, spare clothes and hygiene articles. As a rule, heavy luggage cannot be transported.
- Other than in cases of urgent need, you will be required to bear all risks and costs associated with an organised departure.