

Safeguarding Learning in Turbulent Times

Safeguarding Learning in Turbulent Times: Underscoring the Importance of Resilience Following a Rise in Security Requests and Evacuations

KUALA LUMPUR , MALAYSIA , January 25, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- To mark International Day of Education, International SOS, the world's leading health and security risk services company, underlines the essential role of proactive measures in promoting the health, security and wellbeing of the global education community. This focus is increasingly crucial as educational exchanges and trips resume amidst an increasingly complex geopolitical context and the enduring effects of the global crises.



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Despite ongoing challenges, UNESCO and the Institute of International Education reported that in 2023, the total number of globally mobile international students at the tertiary level remained consistent at 6.4 million. As students participate in educational excursions and exchange programmes, their exposure to diverse environments also brings potential risks. From unexpected illnesses and accidents to security threats and cultural challenges, institutions must be prepared to mitigate these risks and ensure students' wellbeing throughout their

journeys.

A heightened need for resilience is also reflected in International SOS' data, which saw a 20.2% increase in security advice and assistance requests and a 29% increase in evacuations and repatriations from scholastic clients. This surge underscores the growing complexities and uncertainties faced by students and staff, underlining the crucial role of proactive risk management in ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

Henning Snyman, Regional Security Director at International SOS, said "The past few years have challenged educators and institutions on multiple fronts, from navigating immediate demands of online learning and supporting students through pandemic-related anxieties to managing the ever-present risks of a changing world. While the resumption of international mobility within the education sector offers exciting opportunities, this pursuit must be coupled with risk management strategies. Navigating the complex interplay between academic freedom and risk management presents a significant challenge for educators and institutions in today's globalised education landscape.



"Partnering with overseas providers with local expertise can help educational institutions navigate the dynamic travel landscape and strengthens on the ground support for trip participants. Institutions must, however, clarify shared responsibilities for support and emergencies, ensuring seamless integration with their own plans and procedures. Leveraging expertise from the ISO 31030 framework, International SOS is actively involved in the development of the new ISO 31030 standard - Risk Management for Youth and School Trips. This document will provide guidance for managing risk for youth and school trips for both domestic and international travel and include guidelines for creating an emergency response plan."

Dr Nikki Mepham, Regional Medical Director at International SOS, said "Beyond security threats, educational institutions should also evaluate the destination's prevalent diseases and local healthcare capability. It is crucial to ensure that all students and accompanying staff are up to date with their vaccinations, taking antimalarials if prescribed and taking measures to avoid insect bites. By educating and implementing comprehensive prevention and management strategies, schools can minimise the risk of contracting infectious diseases during these outings.

"Psychosocial factors such as cultural adjustment, travel anxieties and potential language barriers should also be considered. Pre-departure workshops and access to mental health resources can support students and staff, providing them with coping mechanisms and also addressing concerns before they arise. Investing in wellbeing, from physical health to mental resilience, allows educational institutions to foster a thriving learning environment where students can explore the world confidently while ensuring their safety."

International SOS offers proactive strategies for educational institutions to ensure the health,

wellbeing, and security of their communities:

1. Conduct thorough pre-travel risk assessments for all educational trips: consider the destination's security and medical landscape, students' unique profiles and potential cultural challenges. Consider whether particular requirements are necessary for individuals with special needs.
2. Provide students and staff with pre-travel health and safety briefings: educate them on local customs, cultural sensitivities health and safety protocols, and emergency procedures. Equip them with resources and communication tools to navigate diverse environments.
3. Invest in comprehensive infection control plans for campuses and travel programmes: implement hygiene protocols, prepare for outbreak scenarios, and ensure access to proper medical resources.
4. Equip trip leaders with incident management protocols and 24/7 assistance and support capabilities: ensure they have appropriate coordination with local providers, access to trusted information and resources to handle unexpected situations.
5. Improving mental health literacy and addressing stigma: training school staff, teachers and peer groups in psychological first aid.

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