

Fieldwork Guidelines & Procedure

Fieldwork is an integral part of most degrees in social sciences, and is a major tool of social science research. It covers a wide range of data gathering activities of different natures, such as conducting formal interviewing, analytical study, informal observation, archive research. It may take place many miles away from the researcher's own home and in a very different social and political context, or even in the researcher's own household; fieldwork study may last a few weeks or more than a year.

Because of the diversity of forms and objectives of fieldwork, the wide range of situations that may be experienced, and outcomes that may be achieved, fieldwork requires very careful planning. This means not only the planning of the travel and the research itself, but also of how data will be accumulated and handled during the fieldwork and afterwards, and how researchers will resume their more usual pattern of life and work after the fieldwork is complete.

Fieldwork is recognised as an integral component of the academic programme. Students participating in fieldwork remain officially enrolled during their time away from campus and are responsible for any applicable tuition fees. Student Services will document all fieldwork-related absences in the student's record.

Students planning to undertake fieldwork must follow the procedures outlined below **at least one month prior to travel** to ensure their research and travel are safe, properly insured, and compliant with the policies of the Geneva Graduate Institute.

Research Ethics

All students are bound by the Graduate Institute's research [ethics guidelines](#) when conducting research abroad. The guidelines include advice and further resources concerning research ethics when conducting field research. Points that are important to bear in mind include: getting the necessary ethics approval(s) before traveling to a country to conduct research; abiding by local laws; collecting informed voluntary consent from all research participants; minimizing the collection of sensitive data; preventing or minimizing harm and possible adverse consequences for human subjects or groups; protecting vulnerable persons, groups and communities; ensuring the safety of researchers and participants; storing personal and sensitive data on password-protected drives, storing identifiers separately; encrypting highly sensitive data; consider anonymisation by design when working with at-risk populations. **All data collected outside Switzerland should be transferred electronically and stored directly on the dedicated drive at the Geneva Graduate Institute (LEAF) via a secure VPN connection. Sensitive data must not transit through unsecured cloud platforms.**

Fieldwork Procedure

All fieldwork plans must be discussed in advance with the academic supervisor. Prior to departure, two forms must be completed, reviewed, and signed by both the student and the supervisor - regardless of whether travel insurance is required:

- **Fieldwork Travel Evaluation Form**
- **Fieldwork Full Risk Assessment Form** (mandatory for medium and high-risk activities or regions)

The **Fieldwork Full Risk Assessment Form** requires an initial review of travel advice provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the student's home country. This advice should be referenced in the checklist, with specific attention to how it pertains to the planned fieldwork activities. The form covers both risk identification and proposed safety measures. While some items may not be applicable, the checklist serves as a framework for conducting a comprehensive review.

The aim is to identify all hazards related to the work, assess associated risks, and develop an appropriate risk reduction plan. Once completed, the written assessment should demonstrate a thoughtful and thorough approach to managing safety concerns. Travel advisory websites should be checked regularly, and the risk assessment must be updated if conditions in the destination country change. Regular communication with the academic supervisor must be maintained during the fieldwork period: **at least once per month** in standard-risk areas, and **every two weeks** in high-risk destinations or when involved in high-risk activities.

Travel Insurance

Once the Full Risk Assessment has been approved by the supervisor, the **Director of Studies Office** will classify the documentation as follows:

- For low-risk destinations and activities: documentation will be filed in the student's record.
- For medium or high-risk destinations: the case will be reviewed individually to determine eligibility for inclusion in the Institute's travel insurance policy (if not already covered by a personal plan).

If approved, the student will be required to complete an additional form and register with the Institute's insurance provider. Coverage is confirmed only after the completion of these steps and receipt of formal travel approval. **It is important to note that students are required to keep their standard health and accident insurance coverage in place throughout their trip.**

As employees of the institute, Teaching and Research Assistants will automatically be covered by the Institute's travel insurance policy, however, they are still required to complete the documentation mentioned above and register with the insurance provider (TSM).

Submission of Forms

All completed travel-related forms must be submitted to directionetudes@graduateinstitute.ch **at least three weeks prior to departure**. For questions or further information, students should contact their **Programme Manager**.

Post-Fieldwork Debrief

Upon return, students are required to debrief with their academic supervisor or another member of academic staff (e.g., professor, researcher). If any medical or psychological concerns arise during or after the fieldwork period, support can be arranged through the *Wellbeing and Student Support Service* (wellbeing-support@graduateinstitute.ch).