

Research conducted outside Australia

What if my research will be conducted outside Australia?

If your research involves collecting data from participants who live outside Australia, then you are conducting research outside Australia. Research conducted outside Australia typically involves travel overseas, however it also increasingly involves remote data collection, such as online interviews or surveys. It also includes research conducted at RMIT campuses located in Vietnam and Europe.

Countries outside Australia can have very different legal, cultural, language, and research environments to Australia. Researchers collecting data from participants overseas must not only ensure their research complies with the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 \(updated 2018\)](#), but also that it respects the legal, cultural, linguistic and research environment of the country in which it is conducted.

What are some important considerations about conducting research overseas?

Researcher safety

If you are travelling overseas to conduct research, you must consider your own safety and the risk of travelling to certain countries. [Commonwealth travel advice](#) is useful for determining the risk of research in other countries. Where the Commonwealth advises that travelers 'exercise a high degree of caution', 'reconsider your need to travel', and/or 'do not travel', you must provide a risk mitigation protocol with your ethics application.

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Strategies to manage risks to researcher safety include experience with the culture, language, and legal framework; a communication plan with co-researchers; and a network of local contacts.

Local laws and regulations

Researchers working in other countries are subject to the legal and regulatory environment of those countries, including the possibility of special visa requirements. You need to be aware of these frameworks and ensure that your research activities are lawful in the country in which it is conducted. For instance, in some countries, criticism of government or identification of participant groups may pose risks to both participants and researchers. Many countries have their own ethics review pathways that researchers need to follow; you need to make yourself aware of these and communicate them in your ethics application.

Local customs and values

Research conducted in other countries must consider local cultural values in both the design and the conduct of the research. Where research is conducted in other countries, participants in those countries should be shown the same respect and protections that the *National Statement* affords participants within Australia. Research should be designed and conducted to accommodate these local values and reflect consultation with local communities.

Where possible, you should provide participants in other countries with the details of a local contact person to field queries and complaints. A local contact person is particularly important in circumstances where participants cannot easily contact the research team or RMIT University in Australia (e.g., participants without access to VOIP or email). In the case of RMIT student researchers, a local contact person is a requirement.

Privacy

Research conducted outside Australia invariably involves collecting data from participants, and usually, transmitting that data back to Australia. Countries have different privacy frameworks that affect how participant data may be stored, accessed and transferred across borders. In addition to any protections that local privacy legislation affords participants, researchers also need to consider if the country in which they are collecting data has a privacy environment similar to the [Victorian Information Privacy Principles](#). If the privacy requirements are different, additional steps may be required to safeguard participant privacy.

Key things to remember when completing the submission:

[Chapter 4.8](#) of the National Statement provides guidance for research seeking to conduct research involving participants located outside Australia. We recommend that you read this chapter when planning your research and prior to commencing your human research ethics application.

Ensure you have considered any potential risks to your safety and have a risk mitigation plan in place.

Ensure you have consulted any privacy and data laws that apply in the country where your research will be conducted.

Additional Resources:

Ethics approval for the research project does not equate to travel approval. When travelling to some countries, researchers may need additional approval from the School or the School of Graduate Research, or the Vice Chancellor's Executive. Please consider the [RMIT Travel policy](#) and the Travel risk matrix. In addition, there may be special visas required to conduct research. It is your responsibility as the researcher to determine if this is required.

Further information

Further information can be found in the [RMIT Research Policy: Human Research Ethics Procedure](#).

For further advice on this topic or other human research ethics matters, please email humanethics@rmit.edu.au.

A Research Governance and Ethics Coordinator will assist you and may connect you to one of the CHEAN or HREC members in your discipline who can offer expert ethics advice.