

**SOLACE** GLOBAL

# FIFA WORLD CUP: QATAR 2022

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFE TRAVEL  
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## Considerations for Safe Travel

### Executive Summary

Duty of care is the moral and legal responsibility of an employer to ensure that the health, safety and security of a person is protected while working. Should an incident occur, a company will have to demonstrate that adequate measures were in place to protect the employee from harm.

Depending on who is travelling, these risks stem from numerous factors. For journalists and media crews, it could include travelling to countries known to repress their profession or places which can pose personal or political threats. Due to their high-profile nature, international sporting events have historically been targets for terrorist attacks, violence and disruption. Alongside these, lower-risk events such as petty crime, illness, injury or detention can all occur when travelling to international sporting events. Many of the risks presented to media personnel operating in-country will be equivalent to those faced by other individuals travelling to Qatar for the tournament.

Examples of sporting events disrupted by serious security incidents include the events of the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, the 2009 bombing of the Sri Lanka Cricket team in Pakistan, the 2013 Boston marathon bombing, and the disruption caused to the African Cup of Nations in Cameroon by Anglophone rebels in January 2022.

This report will outline factors affecting the safety and security of those travelling to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, and will provide mitigatory measures for the threats posed to safety and well being. The event will be held in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December and will see games in at least eight stadiums across the country. More than 1.5 million people are expected to visit Doha during the tournament, with the high-profile nature of the event, the large influx of visitors, and the political risks present in the region presenting a unique security environment for international media and journalists covering the event.

### Travelling to the World Cup

Across the World Cup in Qatar, almost everything will be facilitated by a Hayya Card. This is a personalised document that is issued to and required by every single person attending any of the matches. According to officials, this card will function as a visa, allowing holders to enter Qatar between 1 November and 23 December. It will also grant the holder free bus and metro usage whilst in country. Significantly, it will also allow the holder access to a specific stadium when presented alongside a valid ticket for a particular game.

In a bid to try and manage the flow of people in and out of the country during the world cup, the Qatari authorities have announced that between 1 November and 23 December only citizens, residents and holders of the World Cup Hayya card will be allowed entry to the country. Exceptions to this rule are for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) citizens with a Qatari ID card and those who hold work entry permits.

In tandem with this, a number of neighbouring countries have announced that the Hayya card will also function as a visa in those locations. For instance, the UAE has announced that all those who hold valid Hayya cards will be granted multiple-entry visa to the UAE for a total of up to 90 days from the date of issuance of the visa. This visa will also only cost a one off, reduced fee of 100 Dirhams (around GBP 24). Meanwhile, Oman has announced that Hayya card holders will be granted free multiple entry visas for the duration of the FIFA World Cup, and that these will be valid for a period of up to 60 days. Jordan has also confirmed that the Hayya card will function as a multiple entry visa for those who wish to visit the Kingdom, however they have yet to confirm certain details of this scheme such the time period it will remain in operation for.

For those staying in Qatar itself for the world cup, accommodation can be booked through Qatar's World Cup Accommodation Agency website. Those who are staying with Qatari residents are reminded that their hosts must register the fact that they have World Cup guests on the Hayya Portal.

## Personal Risks

Qatar, like a number of other Islamic countries in the Middle East, bases its legal system on Sharia, which is a type of law derived from Islamic writings and scriptures, most notably the Quran and the Hadith. As a result, societal norms and laws can often differ markedly from those in Europe and North America. Travellers are advised that dressing modestly is promoted under Qatari law. The Qatari government frequently launches campaigns to remind visitors and new arrivals what this means in practice. Females are advised not to wear leggings, miniskirts, sleeveless dresses and short or tight clothing in public. For males, tight clothing is advised against, as are shorts and sleeveless tops.

Under Sharia law, much public affection is viewed as highly immoral by the prevailing norms of society, or may even be against the law, regardless of the genders involved. Public displays of affection should be avoided at all times. As a result, whilst LGBTQ+ individuals also face significant restrictions in Qatar, unmarried heterosexual couples can also break local laws. Under Qatari cohabitation laws, it is illegal for unmarried men and women to live together or share a hotel room. As a result, hotels in the country may require couples who are not married to stay in separate rooms. This is due to a set of laws called Zina, which prohibit sexual intercourse outside of marriage. As a result, under Qatari law, such actions could lead to seven years imprisonment.

Homosexuality is illegal in Qatar, and punishments can vary in severity from up to three years in prison and a fine, or the possibility of death penalty if they are also Muslim. Alongside this, the Qatari government does not recognise same-sex marriages or civil partnerships (even those sanctified in other nations) and has punished those who have campaigned in the country for LGBTQ+ rights.

Since the World Cup was awarded to them, Qatari officials have produced mixed messaging around LGBTQ+ rights. It was initially reported that LGBTQ+ fan safety would be assured as long as they refrained from sexual intercourse, a position which garnered negative feedback and would likely have proved challenging to police. In 2013, the Qatari government stated that all would be welcome as long as they refrained from public affection. In 2022, there were reports that LGBTQ+ icons such as rainbow flags would be confiscated by security officials if they were seen, whilst at the same time it emerged that a number of hotels recommended by FIFA for both teams and fans were refusing to reserve rooms for same-sex couples.

It is also therefore not recommended to use dating applications or online services whilst in-country. If you are caught using such applications, even via the use of VPNs, travellers may face charges. Whilst VPNs are not illegal in Qatar, using one might still provoke suspicion if questioned by authorities. Before travelling, all personal electronic devices should be screened to ensure that these applications (if used) are not on the devices being taken with you.

Sexual assault, or other gender-based violence, has also been reported at previous international and domestic sporting events. In Qatar, victims reporting sexual assault have often been treated poorly by the investigatory authorities and have faced threats of arrest, detention and charges under Zina laws prohibiting non-marital sexual activity. Human rights groups have raised concern that survivors of sexual assault in Qatar may be unable to receive proper medical care, or indeed seek justice. It remains realistically possible that any reports of sexual offences will be treated with greater care and consideration during the world cup period due to the significant political backlash Qatar would face if a high-profile incident were to occur.

Initially it was hoped that Qatar would moderate, even if only temporarily, its strict laws around relationships and public affection for the world cup. However in June 2022, Qatar's Supreme Committee reiterated that Qatar is a conservative country, that public displays of affection are frowned upon regardless of sexual orientation, and that fans, teams, and travelling media personnel would have to respect and abide by the country's laws and customs whilst they were in-country.

## Substance Risks

Alongside many other Gulf nations, Qatar has a particularly low-tolerance approach to drugs and alcohol than those evident across North America and Europe.

Whilst it is not illegal to purchase alcohol in the country, it is strictly controlled, and there is zero tolerance for drinking in public. In tandem with this, being drunk in public is a criminal offence. Alcohol can only be brought

by those over 21-year-olds from licenced hotel restaurants and bars. There is also a single, state-controlled off-licence, but any visitors should be aware they need a permit in order to purchase alcohol from it.

FIFA and Qatar have come to an agreement over the consumption and serving of alcohol at the World Cup. Under this agreement, alcohol will be sold within the eight stadium compounds immediately before and after games finish and end, respectively. However, within the stadiums themselves and whilst games are ongoing only non-alcoholic beverages will be sold. In downtown Doha, at the official FIFA Fan Festival, alcohol will be sold after 18:30 local time. More widely, fans will be able to buy alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages from three days before the start of the World Cup (20 November). The Government of Qatar has also reiterated that bringing alcohol into the country is illegal and will not be tolerated. It must be noted that the punishments for being drunk in public can include prison sentences, flogging and lashing. The US State Department recorded 375 instances of flogging or lashing in 2019 for a variety of offences, include being drunk in public.

Tickets promising access to alcohol for hospitality clients at Qatari stadiums have been on sale since February 2021 as part of corporate packages offering "premium beverages". Media personnel may also be exposed to such hospitality and corporate packages in the course of their work. No further information on how these packages will be managed has been announced, although it is believed that these tickets will have access to exclusive hospitality zones in which such beverages can be served.

Whilst rules around the consumption of alcohol have been somewhat relaxed for the World Cup, rules surrounding drugs have not. There is zero tolerance for drug-related offences in Qatar. The penalties for the use, trafficking, smuggling and possession of drugs (even residual amounts) are severe. Punishment can include lengthy custodial sentences, heavy fines and deportation.

A number of prescription drugs which are recognised as such in other jurisdictions are not recognised in Qatar. In 2014, the Supreme Council of Health for Qatar circulated guidelines for those carrying proscribed medicines to Qatar. As a result, for those who must take prescription medications into Qatar with them, it is advised that they seek further information and guidance from the Qatari embassy or consulate in their country of origin.

## **Political Risks**

Qatar's political system is that of a semi-constitutional monarchy. The country held its first general election in 2021. Under the Qatari system, the hereditary emir of Qatar, currently Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, holds nearly all executive and legislative authority, as well as control of the judiciary. Political freedoms for individuals are strictly limited, with public dissent and civil liberties not tolerated. Indeed, by some estimates around 90 percent of the country have no political rights or electoral opportunities whatsoever. As a result of this lack of space for public protest or dissent, those attending the World Cup should not seek to use it as a platform for social activism, as this could land them in trouble with the Qatari authorities, especially if the social cause runs contrary to Qatar's prevailing social norms and legal system.

The act of preaching or attempting to convert Qatari Muslims away from Islam is also strictly prohibited. This can be punished by up to a decade in prison, whilst individuals who are deemed to possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity can be imprisoned for up to two years. Media personnel and journalists must ensure that they do not possess any of this material in notebooks or personal electronic devices before travelling to Qatar.

Qatar has longed tried to balance its relations with other powers in the region. This means that it enjoys warm ties with a number of states between whom relations are tense, such as the US and Iran. As a result of Qatar's balancing act, none of the nearby states are truly hostile and are therefore unlikely to seek to disrupt the world cup. Alongside this, Qatar's well-funded and robust security force, in conjunction with the limited space for dissent, further mitigates the risk of physical disruption during the tournament.

## **Security**

Qatar is normally home to around 2.8 million people, so the world cup means that it will see its an influx of visitors equating to around 50 percent of its normal population. Given this influx, and the higher incidences of unrest, crowd disturbance or isolated reports of violence at footballing events, there are concerns that the

Qatari security forces may be understaffed to efficiently and safely manage the world cup, especially if multiple incidents occur simultaneously.

In response, the Qatari armed forces have conscripted hundreds of civilians with security experience for the duration of the World Cup. These conscripts will operate security checkpoints at stadiums, with the aim of liberating more-experienced personnel to respond to security incidents. Alongside this, Qatar has an agreement with Turkey to temporarily deploy 3,000 Turkish riot police to provide security for stadiums and designated hotels. The Qatari government has agreed to pay for this, however the personnel will not be placed under Qatari command but will remain under Turkish command. Turkish police are known to use forceful crowd dispersal tactics at sporting events, including tear gas, whilst Turkish authorities are also regarded as hostile to press freedom. Both of these factors raise the risk profile for media personnel attending games.

In an effort to enable the Qatari police force to gain exposure to policing mass events, hundreds of Qatari police officers have been seconded to various sporting events since 2010. These include the UEFA European Championships, UEFA Champions League finals and major UK games such as Manchester United versus Liverpool or between Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow.

There are a number of significant physical risks associated with football in particular more than any other sport, with considerable historical precedent. Whilst in many cases these incidents primarily affect fans, media personnel attending games are also vulnerable to the same risks. The British National Union of Journalists (NUJ), an affiliate of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), has reported several attacks against media workers covering football games in the UK, including both verbal and physical abuse and threats of violence.

The Champions league final in Paris in May 2022 was delayed by more than 30 minutes after French police forcefully prevented people from entering the stadium compound, following reports that a large number of fans might attempt to enter the stadium without legitimate tickets. Fans were reportedly teargassed and many reported a high prevalence of mugging around the stadium. More recently, in September 2022, at least 125 people were killed after a stampede at a stadium in Indonesia. Fans that had stormed the pitch were teargassed by security forces, leading to suffocation and trampling as people tried to escape through locked exits.

The World Cup, like many other global sporting events, is almost certainly an aspirational target for extremist groups active in the wider Middle East. As a result, there remains considerable potential for groups or individuals to target the venues or attendees. Media personnel likely represent high-profile targets for such actors. Travellers are advised to maintain situational awareness at all times and to report any suspicious activity to the nearest Qatari authorities.

## **COVID-19**

Qatar has vaccinated around 96 percent of its population, one of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the world. Despite this, the Qatari government retains stringent controls on COVID-19 and epidemiological measures. For instance, all travelling fans are required to take a test before arriving, and all players and officials at the tournament are required to prove they remain negative, with tests every two days.

Alongside this, for the duration of the world cup all visitors to Qatar will have to download the government's Ehteraz app to their smartphones on arrival. Through this app they will be expected to upload their latest COVID-19 status, with the app and associated uploaded COVID-19 status required to enter all public buildings including stadiums.

The Qatari government adjusts epidemiological measures based on the number of known COVID-19 cases in the country. This means that stricter measures such as social distancing or mask-mandates could be reimposed at short notice if the government detects an uptick in cases. Given the influx of visitors from around the world to Qatar and the fact that stadiums and fan zones will often be busy, a spike in COVID-19 infection rates remains possible during the tournament.

## Other Risks

Qatar has extremely modern and well-developed national transportation infrastructure. As a result, there are few risks involved in transportation within the country. For those that wish to self-drive whilst in-country, Qatari drivers can often drive in a fast and aggressive manner, whilst in remote (often desert) parts of the country, there may be a lack of lighting and road safety infrastructure. Accident culpability can be complex. If no one is injured and responsibility is clear, you may take photos before moving vehicles to the side of road and filing a report using the Metrash2 application. If responsibility is unclear, or injuries have been sustained, you must call the police on 999, who will attend the scene, prepare reports, and will apportion blame. Qatari officers do speak English, but not all may be fluent. Ensure not to sign anything unless you fully understand what it is. Remain calm when explaining your side of events, and do not accept responsibility until the police have made their reports. Always carry your driving licence, proof of insurance, additional ID such as passport and proof of ownership/rental agreement.

The country has a desert climate with mild winters and extremely hot summers, the average temperature in November ranges from 20-30 degrees Celsius. Qatar experiences a period of heavier rainfall between December-March, when particularly wet months can lead to flash flooding. Such flooding has often led to road closures, and has on more than one occasion also led to a halt of air traffic at Hamad International Airport. Dust storms can occur at any time of year and can cause both visibility and respiratory issues. When these occur, it is best not to go outside unless necessary. If you do have to travel or operate outside during a sandstorm, it is advised that you wear a face covering, eye coverings, and full sleeved clothing, to protect from sand rash and the inhalation of fine dust and sand particles. The country is classed by the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery as being low risk for an earthquake, however it can sometimes experience earth tremors emanating from quakes with an epicentre in southern Iran.

## Access Trusted Intelligence

Travelling to environments which could be unstable or predictable can impact both mental and physical health. For media personnel and journalists, decisions about safety may not be the primary concern. Giving your staff access to a constant feed of credible intelligence can help users make well-informed decisions based on the most recent developments within the country. Ensuring that the intelligence is up to date, relevant and from trusted sources also forms part of an employer's due diligence and duty of care to safeguard employees.

## Support from a Travel Risk Management Company

Access to risk management technology such as Solace Secure can provide reassurance to your team whilst in country and can play a part in helping you meet your duty of care to employees, by providing access to 24/7/365 crisis response, key intelligence based on their location, and facilitating regular check-ins to ensure staff are safe and well. Consider integrating GPS devices into such platforms to ensure coverage is available if phone or internet signal becomes interrupted.

## Get further intelligence to reduce your organisation's risk

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