

Global Responsible Engagement: Checklist

Global dynamic engagement is and has always been an essential part of academic work. Collaboration with international partners must be encouraged. Though, in the current multipolar global context, collaboration with foreign partners and transborder research have become more complex.

Increased geopolitical tension as well as increased collaboration with partners in countries with non-democratic governance or in active warfare, rapidly growing research systems, or violation of academic freedom, might lead to several ethical and security risks for academic collaboration. The universities must therefore be observant and develop instruments for sustaining global responsible engagement.

The Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions, SUHF, has identified a checklist for guidance on ethical issues in international collaboration to support the members in their work to secure a responsible global engagement. The checklist is intended to assist in preparing international collaboration and projects.¹

In addition to this checklist, the higher education institution has the possibility to contact [the SUHF global relations advisory group](#) for advice.

Indicators

The six indicators in the list below, are meant to be used in the accurate level of the institution before entering into international collaboration. It can also be used as an instrument for dialogue with potential international partners. The list is not regarded as exhaustive, there could be other relevant issues to consider.

Indicator 1: Democratic principles and restricted academic freedom
Is the partner located in, or associated with, a country where sanctions may have been imposed by the EU or UN (EU Sanctions Map), where democratic freedom and rights are restricted, or where violations of human rights or academic freedom are well documented (Freedom in the World , World Justice Project Rule of Law , Academic Freedom – V-Dem)? Is there a risk that authorities of the country or the university will influence content of project, choice of research area, or data collection?

¹ This list has been inspired by the report: Shih, T., Gaunt, A. & Östlund, S. (2020). Responsible internationalisation: Guidelines for reflection on international academic collaboration. Stockholm: STINT, 2020.

Indicator 2: Partner reputation and university values
Are there any potential ethical or reputational risks to you, your partner, your institution, or other partners to your institution? What is the partner's relation with the government and political parties in the partner country? Will the project, or any activity related to the project, be in conflict with your institution's core values.
Indicator 3: Conflicts regarding use of data, IPR and patent rights
Do you and your partner have a common understanding of access to data before use, implications of confidentiality, ownership of results, intellectual property rights including the right of staff to exploit research results for patent and commercialisation? How will proper data protection be ensured?
Indicator 4: Misuse of research and negative unintended applications
Could the visit/project/collaboration be directly misunderstood, misused, or have obvious unintended applications which would be negative? Does the collaboration include, or could be associated with, an actor within or closely linked to armed forces or the defence industry, or a partner violating human rights?
Indicator 5: Ethical dumping and security around personnel and biological data
Does the project/collaboration raise significant ethical concerns related to the use of animals, humans, human tissue, or personnel data? Has the research project, if needed, obtained ethical clearance in the collaborating country and by the Swedish ethical review authority? Does the collaboration include sharing of personnel data or large-scale biological data that can be derived into personal data without ethics permit and data transfer agreements in place?
Indicator 6: Personal safety
Is there any risk for discrimination or repression of representatives from your institution or partner representatives in the partner country – legally as well as in practice? Will the visit/project/collaboration expose staff or doctoral students, partner colleagues or students, for an increased personal risk related to areas such as transmittable diseases, terror threats, criminality, corruption, espionage, information theft?