



Crisis Management For International Offices



Introduction	1
A crisis defined	2
What constitutes a crisis?	2
The COVID-19 crisis	2
Implications on international mobilities and partnerships	3
Managing mobilities more efficiently during a crisis	5
Top tips to get ready for any crisis	5
5 steps to prepare using MoveON	6
Maximize the value of international partnerships	9
How to respond during a crisis and beyond	9
How QS Unisolution can help	12
Conclusion	13
References	14

Critical success factors in building resilience against a crisis

Institutions recognize the opportunities and funding that mobility and international partnerships, with peer institutions, can present. Increasingly, institutions are looking to develop and support international partnerships with leading institutions and organizations across the world, in line with the aims and objectives of their internationalization strategic goals.

However, this intensification of international partnership and mobility activity introduces a range of risks. Many unexpected events present risks, ranging from the current outbreak of the novel coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) to political instability, conflict, natural disasters, and many other crises.

Managing the impacts and potential risks of a crisis is at the forefront of many international officers' minds. Navigating a crisis of any scale and being able to respond quickly and effectively, depends on having a crisis management plan in place. Success relies not only on managing the short-term consequences, but also thinking longer term about how to maintain international partnerships and identify funding and other opportunities to be able to hit the ground running once the crisis is over.

This white paper will highlight what, typically, constitutes a crisis and how to manage student mobility and international partnerships in times of crisis; in particular, during the COVID-19 crisis. We will suggest tips, ideas, and resources on how to improve an international office's preparedness in the event of a crisis and share real-life examples. We will also offer ideas about how to maximize the value of international relationships during this time.



A crisis defined

“A crisis is an unstable condition involving an impending abrupt or significant change that requires urgent attention and action to protect life, assets, property, or the environment.”

Defined by ISO, the International Organization for Standardization

While the term ‘crisis’ is difficult to define, it’s generally considered to be a serious situation, occurrence, or phenomenon that happens unexpectedly. A crisis has the potential for far-reaching effects on a regional, national, or even international scale. If not handled in an appropriate and timely manner, (or if not dealt with at all) a crisis can have negative consequences which may turn into a disaster or catastrophe.

What constitutes a crisis?

The types of crisis a university may face can be categorized based on the severity and level of response required. The least severe type of crisis, which has minimal impact, can be managed through routine protocols and procedures. For the most severe crises, which have a far-reaching impact and present substantial risks to students, institutions must be prepared for the unimaginable. They must be ready with the right resources in place for their students, faculty, and staff.

Types of crises include:

- **Widespread disruption to normal operations for an extended period:** Caused by situations such as pandemics, disasters (natural or man-made), power outages, severe weather, environmental issues, student protests, strike action, economic crises, cyber-attacks, and terrorism etc.
- **Any incident that threatens the reputation of the university:** For instance, confidentiality breaches, criminal behaviour, labor and employment issues, lawsuits, adverse coverage in the press, scandals, or negligence.
- **Serious injury or death:** If staff, students, or visitors are involved in an accident resulting in injury or death whilst undertaking university work.
- **A serious illness on the university campus:** For example, this could be a meningitis outbreak.
- **Serious safety or welfare concerns:** If a student appears to be missing for an extended period.¹

The COVID-19 crisis

At the date of this publication, the novel coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID-19, is causing massive disruption to daily life across Europe and around the world². The virus appears to have first emerged in Wuhan, China, in late 2019. The outbreak has since spread across China to other countries around the world. By the end of January, the coronavirus had been declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO).³

On March 11, WHO declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, signifying how widely the virus has disseminated, and how quickly cases have spread amongst communities around the world.

“The coronavirus pandemic is causing large-scale loss of life and severe human suffering. It is a public health crisis without precedent in living memory which is testing our collective capacity to respond.”⁴

Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, OECD

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the emergence of this new coronavirus has presented the global economy with its greatest danger since the financial crisis. It poses far-reaching human, social, economic, political, and national security implications, with huge disruption to essential services including health, transport, banking, and basic resources. For an indefinite period, the coronavirus is continuing to raise health concerns and the risk of wider restrictions on the movement of people, goods, and services.

Implications on international mobilities and partnerships

The coronavirus outbreak has already affected more than 130 countries⁵ and impacted over 80% of the world’s student population. Unquestionably, the pandemic continues to challenge many aspects of international higher education and the scope and scale of this crisis means that many institutions are attempting to mitigate the consequences and find new ways to adapt.



Due to campus closures and movement restrictions, thousands of students, who were engaged in semester-long or shorter mobility programs, have had to return home. In addition, universities have prohibited all outward mobility for the foreseeable future. While the crisis has called a halt to mobility programs temporarily, it is unlikely that these programs will suffer long-term decline.

The immediate urgency facing international offices during this time is to work with partners to get all student and staff mobilities safely home and to make this transition as smooth as possible.

During this period, the overarching challenge facing institutions is funding. As most international offices are reliant on funding from student mobility programs and international student recruitment, the priority is to manage partnerships in the pipeline. They must also explore which partnerships could be leveraged to maximize their value and create opportunities to collaborate in different ways.

In what may be described as a 'forced pause', it is essential that institutions prepare strategies, with partners, schools, and sponsoring faculties, to ensure that they are better prepared to recover operational effectiveness quickly once the crisis is resolved.

Managing mobilities more efficiently during a crisis

Today, many host universities and home universities, as well as the relevant departments and faculty, play a key role in supporting those on mobility programs to be prepared for unexpected situations. With safety and security being the primary concern in the event of a crisis, it's important to have risk management strategies and response protocols in place for when such situations arise.

It is necessary for international offices to establish emergency response procedures and protocols to help them to deal with a number of different contingencies and scenarios. It is also imperative to manage risks and threats, and protect all constituents, including those taking part in mobility programs and the institution, as well as any legal issues and liabilities.

Top tips to get ready for any crisis

1. Prepare in advance

The time to deal with a crisis is not when it happens but long before.

While it may not be possible to plan for all contingencies involving students and staff abroad, having a crisis management policy in place before a crisis strikes is increasingly important to minimize the potential damage.

Protecting exchange programs and participants with a prearranged emergency response enables universities to act quickly and effectively when emergencies arise, so that emergencies can be dealt with efficiently.

2. Make the plan all-encompassing

Risk management needs to be thought of as a comprehensive strategy, rather than just a checklist or series of tasks. Ensure that the international office is included in institutional planning and make sure to establish an office plan.

A comprehensive strategy can help international officers to establish orderly, considered processes, procedures, and communications that will be required in an emergency response. It's good practice to have a written plan and that, if any changes need to be made, they are revised and documented. Finally, make sure that all the people involved understand it and can implement it.⁶

3. Evaluate routinely and regularly

Typically, crisis management plans will incorporate the emergency response, crisis communications, and any steps that should be taken to trigger an official response to a crisis. The factors that contribute to risk can change, so make sure the plan is evaluated routinely to ensure that it is up to date. In an ever-changing world, the types of mobility programs change, methods of communication change, students and their needs change, and the expectations of what universities and colleges are willing to provide change.



4. Involve relevant departments

Crisis management planning needs to happen in coordination with other relevant departments and faculties.

In the event of a crisis, most staff will have to be involved in crisis recovery, so it's important that they are prepared and understand the roles they'll play. Naturally, some staff will be more involved than others in planning for certain types of crisis. But even then, keeping everyone apprised of how to continue 'day to day' operational processes in the event of a crisis is also critically important.

5. Create a communication hub

To enable international officers to share important information with others, it's good practice to set up and maintain a dedicated area of the international office website for emergency guidance and information. Any resources, news reports, statuses, and other information, specific to international students and staff, can be accessed here in a clear and compelling format. This resource hub can be updated at any time, for any type of crisis, and can be easily accessed from any device. Importantly, students can be directed to this hub and the latest information from their social channels.⁷

5 steps to prepare using MoveON

GETTING STARTED CHECKLIST

Take some time to reflect on the following questions:

- At any given time, do you know where all your students are studying abroad?
- Do you have the latest emergency contact details for all your mobility students?
- Can you reach affected mobility students wherever they are during a crisis?
- Do you have communications ready to reach this group of students?

To respond in the event of a crisis, we've pulled together a list of recommendations of how international offices can use MoveON to manage mobilities during a crisis.

1. Identify students who are at risk

Universities using MoveON can use Advanced Search functionality to help them to identify affected mobility students so they can contact individuals and groups who may need help or guidance.

Common search fields, that can be used to identify mobilities, include the following: country, institution, city, framework, stay type, groups, status, planned start date, planned end date, start semester, or end semester.

As an example, institutions can look for all students on a mobility in Spain, which started last semester, and which has not yet ended. The results of an Advanced Search can then be saved as an advanced view, and this list can be shared with colleagues who may need access to those students affected.

2. Be proactive and targeted in getting information to mobilities

One of the first things international officers should do in a crisis is to contact those outgoing student mobilities, that are overseas, so they can monitor their well-being, provide travel and mobility-related information, and notify them of any updates their host country is announcing. During this time, be supportive and direct them to the appropriate support services depending on their specific need.

Staff also need to be able to reach those inbound mobilities from the countries most affected by the crisis and keep all parties updated.

In order to communicate with mobilities overseas, email is most commonly used. In fact, 38% of respondents⁸ from the recent EAIE survey specifically pointed to this as the preferred communication tool.

In MoveON, administrators can use email templates to easily communicate with their students while they are abroad. Staff can create their messages in advance, when they have the time to prepare, think about what needs to be communicated, and pre-populate the email templates, so they are ready to use.



3. Collect emergency information from all mobilities

It's essential to have up-to-date emergency information for both incoming and outgoing students before a crisis happens. An Online Form can be set up to enable international officers to gather this information from their students.

This could include capturing their religion, any illnesses, food intolerances, contact details for their emergency contact, and their residence address in host city.

The optimal time to capture this information, in the Online Form, is once a mobility has been accepted. Once the information is submitted by the student, it then feeds into designated custom fields under the "stay" of the student.

4. Check if emergency details have been submitted

An Advanced View can be created to track the information that has been submitted. Consequently, if a student has not provided information in the form, they can be reminded to do so.

Automatic email reminders can be created using Advanced Process Automation. The process triggers an email to ask the student to submit the form. A template rule can ensure that the reminder is sent to a student if they have not submitted the emergency form. This rule can be time based to remind students after seven days or fourteen days after the first email, if no data has been imported for their stay.

Once the information is submitted by the student, it is automatically updated in the MoveON database, which essentially provides more accurate information in the event of a crisis.

5. Improve reporting on mobilities

Improved reporting may be somewhat overshadowed right now, but it is nonetheless important. With the availability of more accurate information on who is travelling where, it provides more data points on which to report on internationalization efforts, as well as giving more accurate insight into where mobilities are going abroad.

The availability of this data can be used for a myriad of purposes, especially during a crisis. For example, by applying Advanced Views the data can be used to illustrate mobility by school, how many students are going abroad, from which faculty they are going abroad from, the programs they are participating in, and the balance between incoming and outgoing students. The speed at which this level of detail can be accessed is fundamental in times of crisis.

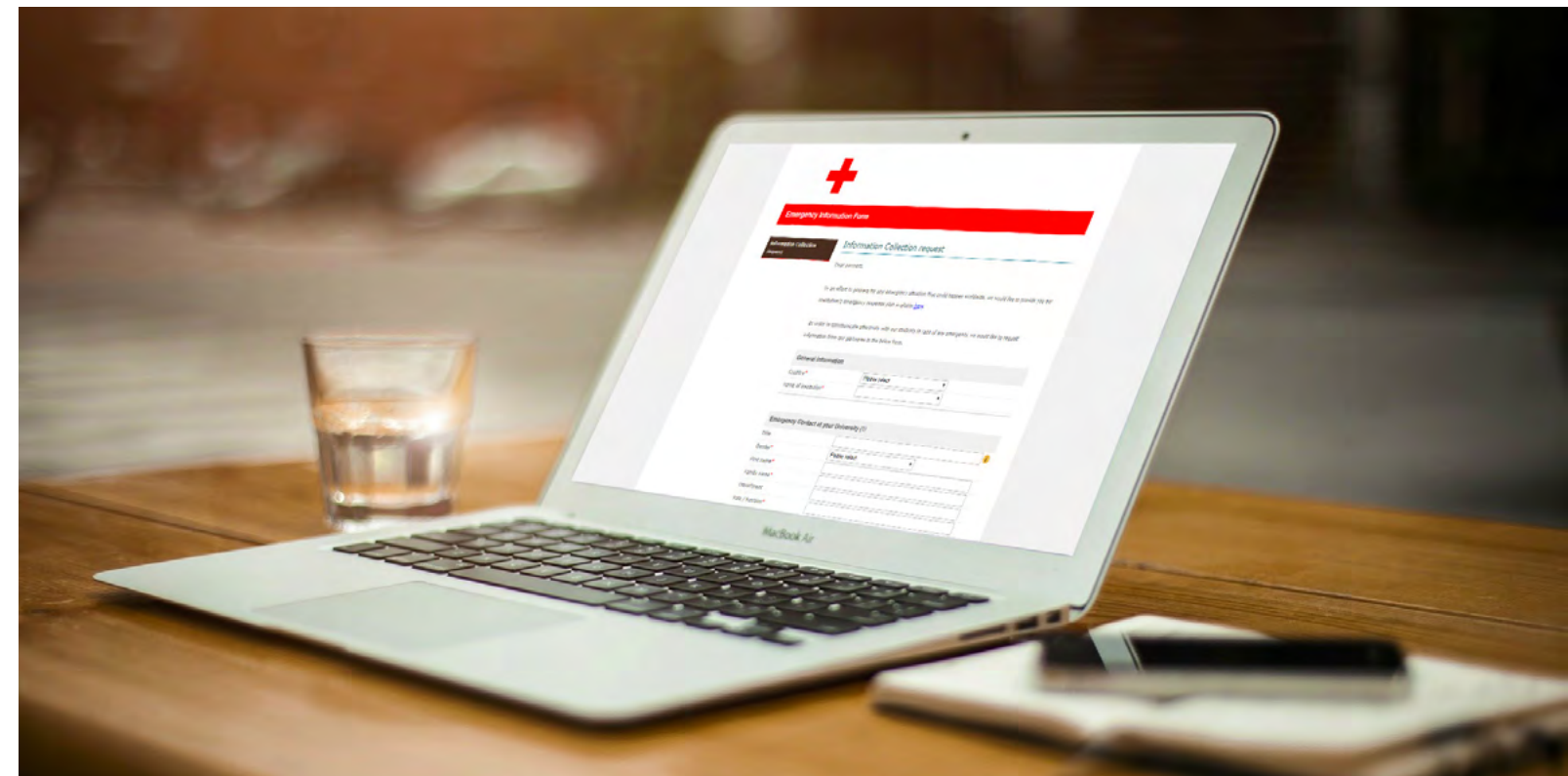
Maximize the value of international partnerships

How to respond during a crisis and beyond

1. Collect and publish emergency policies and response plans

In the event of a crisis, institutions need to have access to all partners' institution emergency policies, response plans, and contacts, so that students can easily access them through a simple search online.

To collect partner information, an Online Emergency Information Form can be created in MoveON where partners can submit their documents and data. The information that is collected updates the external contacts and external institutions' fields in MoveON's back-office database.



To enable students and staff to quickly and easily search for a partner's crisis response documents, the information can be displayed using the Advanced Publisher tool on an institution's website. The Advanced Publisher feature reaches into the MoveON database and extracts the records that meet the criteria that have been chosen.



2. Track international partnerships

During a crisis, such as COVID-19, where normal activities may have slowed down, it's an opportunity to focus on the administrative processes involving partnerships.

MoveON enables international offices to work with schools and faculty to keep a distinct record for all types of international relations and connect them in multiple ways, in one single place. These activities could range from informal collaborations between faculty members, formalized research agreements, joint degree programs, different types of articulation agreements and events, to consortia that people are a part of.

3. Measure the value of partnerships

It is advantageous to start thinking about what happens after the crisis. This involves knowing which partnerships are the most successful and focusing efforts on these. With access to partnership activity, institutions can focus on making better decisions about strategic direction, deepening the right partnerships, and possibly ending or enhancing others.

The Advanced Publisher offers increased reporting capabilities, that helps to issue reports related to internationalization efforts, such as the institution's external relationships. These reports can be accessed and controlled through a password and viewed in mobile-friendly formats, such as smartphones or tablets, from anywhere, at any time in the world.

4. Use a virtual mode of delivery

The ability to develop or maintain virtual relationships with partners when students are unable to study abroad can ensure that it is possible to continue to offer mobility programs.

To avoid losing partners and have students falling behind during the current COVID-19 crisis, there may be opportunities to offer hybrid enrollments where the first part of a mobility program can be completed online, at home. Then, once the crisis is in recovery phase and students can travel to campus, they can complete their program at the host institution.

Also, international partnership offices have traditionally relied on face-to-face connections, including events, sending delegations, receiving visitors etc. A lot of this type of relationship building is uncertain, with many institutions having travel prohibitions in place through to the end of the year. With this in mind, maintaining the strength of these partnerships is increasingly challenging.

MoveON's Advanced Publisher reporting capabilities can help institutions to decide which partnerships and types of activities should be developed virtually during a crisis.

5. Leverage institutional strengths abroad

Given funding pressures, as a result of cancelled mobility programs, there is a new urgency around identifying partnerships that will drive income. For example, if a school can identify another school that has similar research priorities, goals, or teaching approaches then an opportunity could be developed to collaborate in the identification and application for grants. Experience suggests that collaborative ventures like this have a higher chance of winning grants.

6. Lend support to international partners in times of need

Sometimes the nature of a partnership will be one where institutions can use their expertise and knowledge to support their international partners with whom they've worked closely together. By offering support, it helps to keep an institution's operations going, and lines of communication open, which otherwise may have been compromised in times of crisis. Most importantly, as institutions rise out of the crisis, they need to think strategically about how to leverage the situation to strengthen international partnerships.

When it comes to COVID-19, there are opportunities for institutions that have faced the challenges of rapidly scaling emergency responses to offer insights, online workshops, or video conferences. With the longer-term goal to improve relations, institutions can share best practises and thus help other partners to be more effective when the situation escalates in their regions.

How QS Unisolution can help

Here at QS Unisolution, we share a common goal with our partner universities. We help institutions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of international mobility and partnership management activities by having one place to store institution-wide mobility and partnership data. By empowering institutions to transform their mobility processes and maximize the value of their partnerships, they are better prepared to respond to a crisis.

We believe that this makes us perfectly positioned to partner with institutions globally to help ensure that, in times of crisis, they have the tools, processes, data, and communications to enable them to respond quickly.



Conclusion

Today, more than ever, it is imperative for international offices to have a crisis plan in place to help mitigate the risks that students face when embarking on mobility programs and to leverage their international partnerships.

With this in mind, this white paper outlined not only what constitutes a crisis for a university, but how an institution can positively respond during a global crisis such as COVID-19.

We have also provided best practices to make it easier for international offices to respond more effectively to students and faculty on mobility programs in times of crisis. Finally, we illustrated how to maximize international partnerships during uncertain times.

For more information, visit our website: <https://www.qs-unisolution.com/>

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