

Country Medical Risk Ratings:
a tool to support international traveller preparation

TM2

Authors: Irene Lai, Sharlie Chan, Diego Zendejas

Affiliations: International SOS, Sydney, Australia

BACKGROUND

Risk indices measure a wide range of threats, including natural hazards, humanitarian crises, financial stability, cybersecurity, physical security, crime and terrorism. Governments, organisations and individuals use these scales to support planning and decision-making. **Country Medical Risk Ratings**, first developed by International SOS more than 20 years ago, are a pioneering tool designed to support the health preparation of international travellers. We are not aware of any other tool that compares medical risk levels by reflecting the type and level of medical support travellers commonly require.

Tools used by health professionals to prepare travellers typically describe destination-specific environmental and infectious disease risks and link these to preventive measures such as vaccinations, medications, food and water precautions, and recommended health facilities. Additional preparation is usually advised for remote, wilderness or extreme-environment travel. However, assessments of a destination's healthcare capability are often absent, even though general information can be found through several foreign affairs departments.

Travellers who need medical care abroad may face challenges if required services, medications or treatments are unavailable or differ significantly from those in their home country. These gaps can lead to major travel disruption, failed assignments and substantial costs for individuals or organisations. **Country Medical Risk Ratings** help anticipate the level of healthcare support likely to be available at a destination.

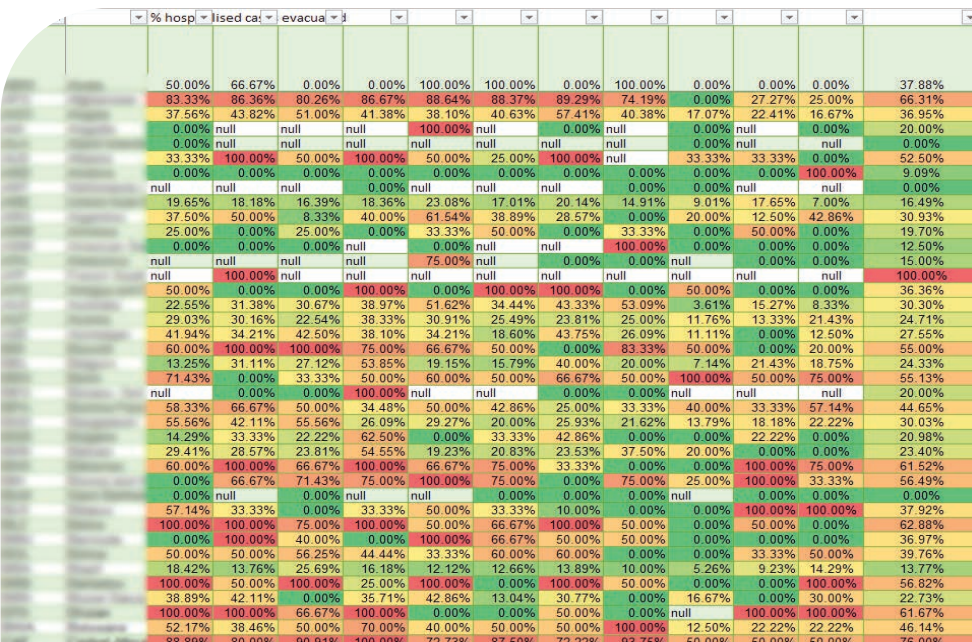


RISK RATING METHODOLOGY

Countries and territories are assessed on an annual basis using a structured, two-tiered assessment combining internal operational data with selected external public health indicators, with ad hoc reviews when major crises occur.

Internal operational data has three elements:

1. A medical care score is derived from a 19-item assessment completed by International SOS Regional Medical Directors covering healthcare standards, emergency capability, pharmaceutical availability, water and blood safety, and service accessibility.
2. An evacuation score is calculated based on the 10-year average of hospitalised cases that were medically evacuated out of country.
3. The International SOS Security Country Risk Rating – insignificant, low, medium, high and extreme.

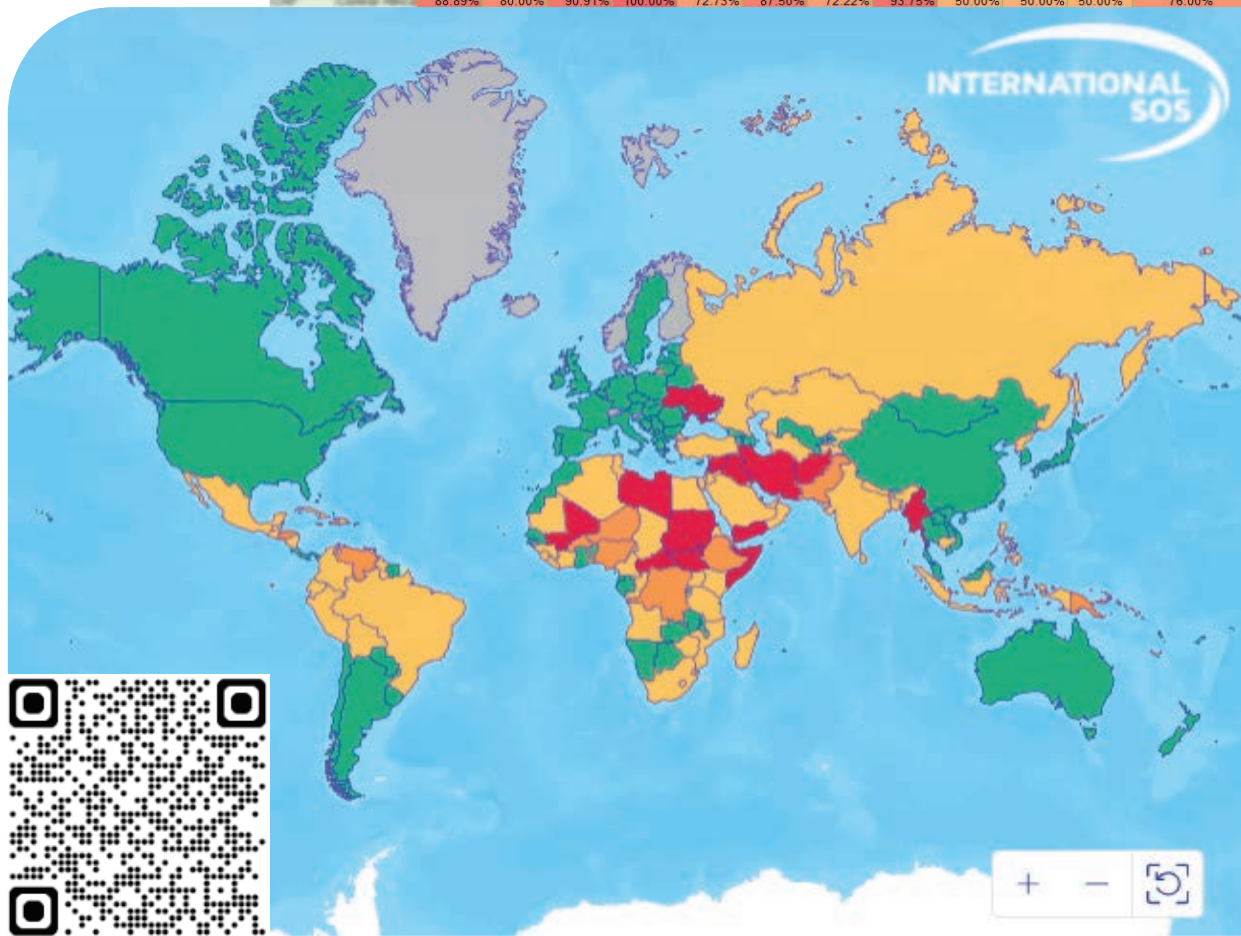


External indicators are from open source data and include physicians and nurses per 1,000 population, hospital bed availability, maternal and neonatal mortality, deaths attributable to air pollution, deaths attributable to inadequate safe water/sanitation, universal health coverage index and life expectancy.

Inputs are standardised and aggregated to create a comparative score, grouped into four risk levels:

● Low, ● Medium, ● High, ● Extreme (Very High).

A fifth level, ● Variable, is included in [an open-access map](#).



RESULTS

Country Medical Risk Ratings allow coarse comparison of country medical capabilities. Most locations fall within the Medium and High risk categories. Most High and Extreme risk locations are in the African and Eastern Mediterranean regions, while the European and Western Pacific regions have the greatest share of Low risk countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

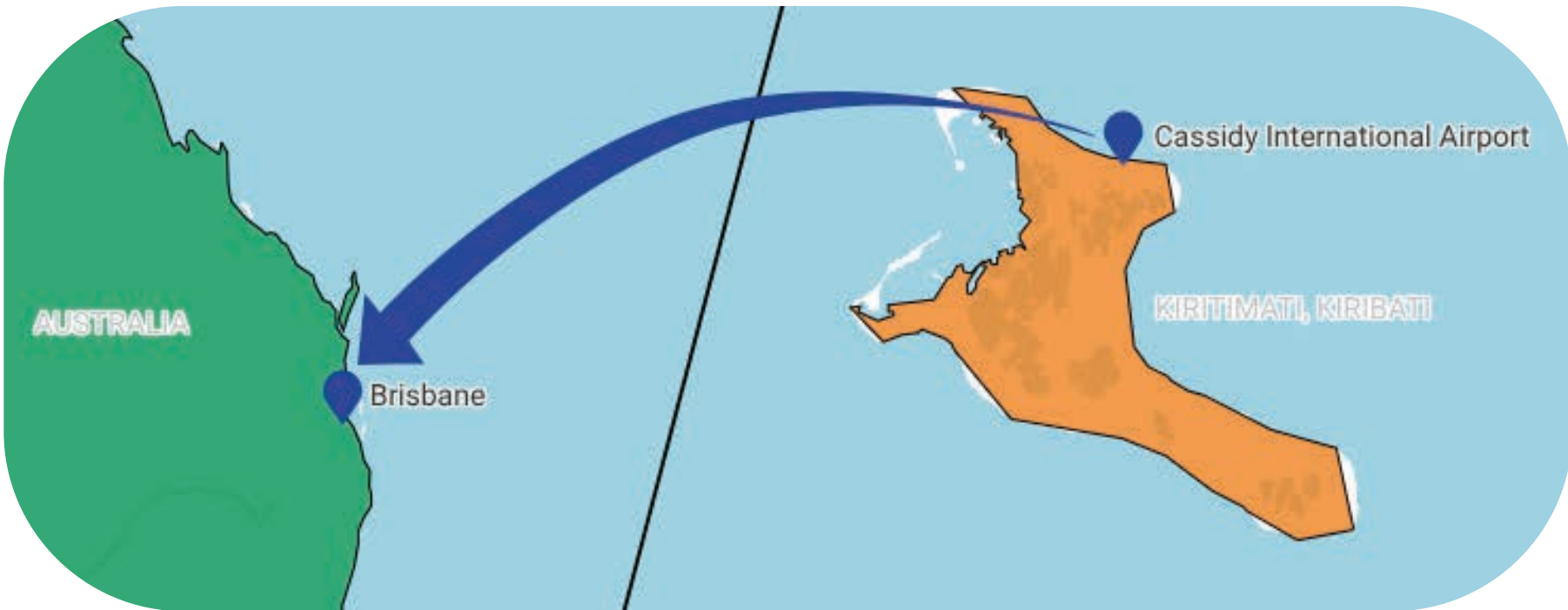
Country medical risk ratings can be used by organisations and health professionals to prepare their employees and patients for travel. The higher the medical risk level, the more likely the level of health care available is limited and the more self-sufficient travellers will need to be.

Organisations may align travel policies to risk tiers, for example requiring a pre-travel health consultation for destinations that are more than Low risk, or restricting travel to Extreme risk locations.

Travel health professionals can use the Ratings to target locations likely to be suitable for the traveller's health conditions. The Ratings help inform the need for detailed care arrangements prior to departure, and likely locations where suitable care is available.

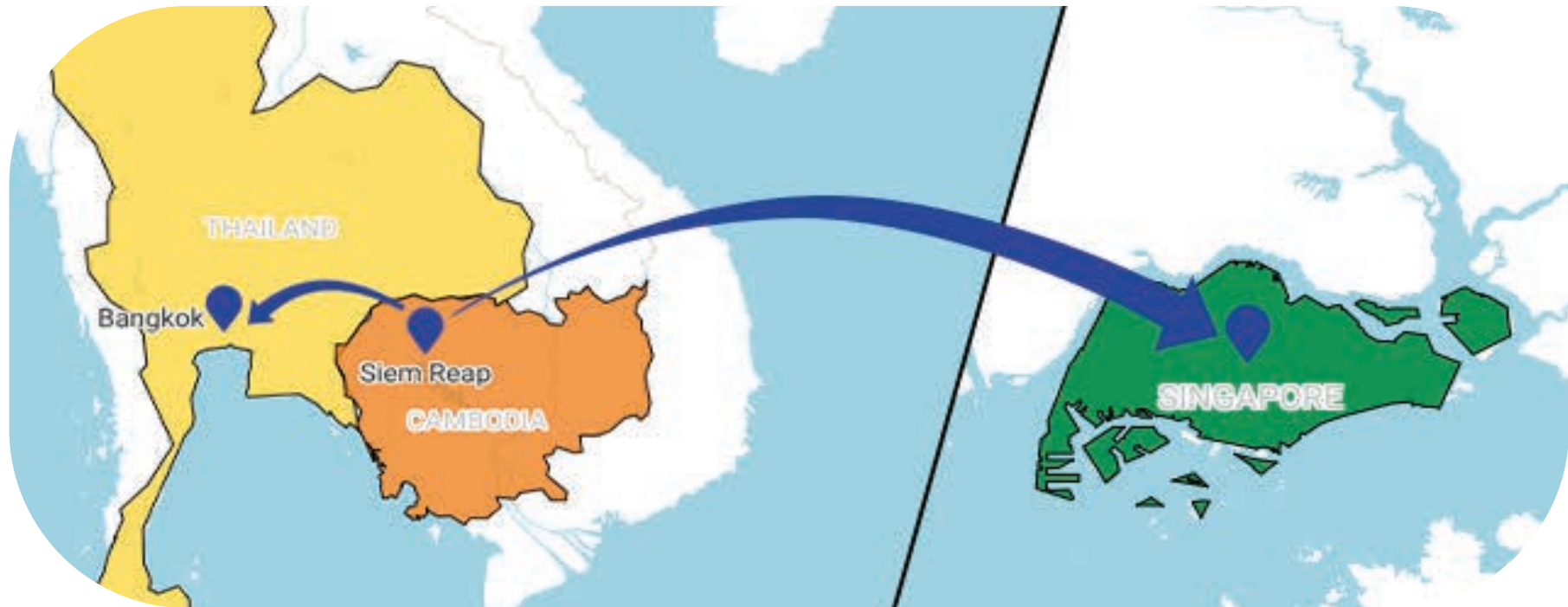
In addition to knowing the infectious diseases and environmental risks travellers are likely to encounter, travel health practitioners should be aware of the general medical capabilities of destinations. Medical preparation for short- and long-term travel to higher risk countries should be rigorous, as in-country support for health issues is more challenging or unavailable compared to lower risk countries. Travellers who require ongoing medical care should be advised that travel should only proceed after establishing a practical care plan. Whilst this is broadly possible for Low risk locations, it is more difficult in Medium risk countries, and potentially not possible in High and Extreme risk locations.

EXAMPLES: Australian Travellers



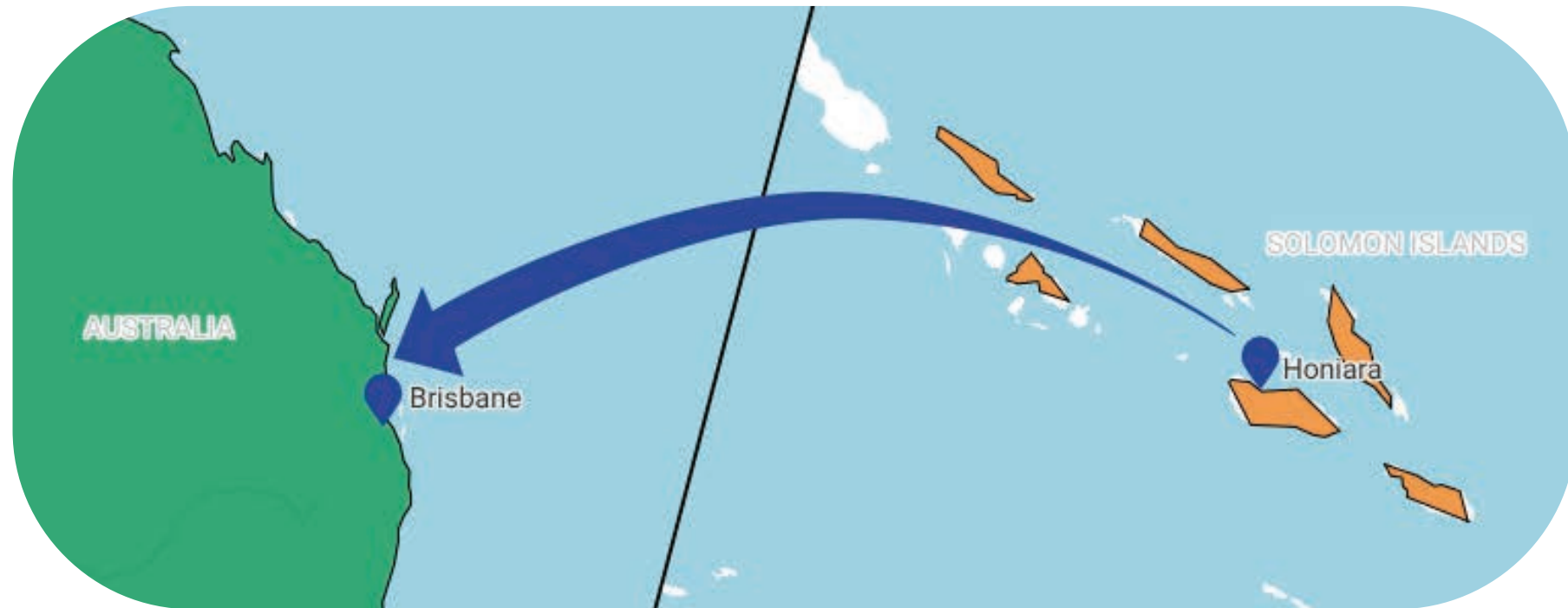
2-year posting to Kiribati

41-year-old male with congenital heart disease developed atrial fibrillation requiring air ambulance evacuation to **Australia** for management. **Kiribati** is rated High medical risk, indicating that specialist care is likely very limited, and unsuitable for a traveller with ongoing cardiac specialist management. A Low medical risk location would be an appropriate location for assignment.



Pregnancy management in Siem Reap, Cambodia

In addition to considering the risk of arbovirus infection for women who may be/become pregnant, travel health professionals should consider the location's maternal and neonatal services capabilities. High risk countries in general have higher maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality, and do not have robust neonatal ICU capabilities. International assignees in **Cambodia** may have antenatal care and delivery arranged in nearby lower risk locations such as **Bangkok, Thailand**, or **Singapore**.



Follow-up blood tests, Honiara, Solomon Islands

Following assessment by her general practitioner, a 34-year-old female commenced a 12-month assignment. Autoimmune screening blood tests had been undertaken for non-specific symptoms, with the majority or results considered normal. However a follow-up immunoelectrophoresis-serum test was recommended. As this test is unavailable in **Solomon Islands**, and there was no ability to have the serum collected in location and transported for analysis, the assignee had to return to **Australia**. **Solomon Islands** is a High medical risk location. In general, medical investigations, including laboratory tests and radiological imaging, are limited in High risk locations.

DEFINITIONS

● Low Medical Risk

Quality medical care is available throughout. Specialist care, emergency and dental services, and quality prescription drugs are widely available. The risk of gastrointestinal infectious diseases is low due to widespread access to quality sanitation and drinking water sources.

Medical assistance commonly required for travellers: Medical referral. Assistance with payment, language and cultural differences. Evacuation rarely required.

● Medium Medical Risk

Quality general medical care and prescription drugs are available from selected providers. Emergency services, limited specialist and dental care are usually reliable. The risk of gastrointestinal infectious diseases is moderate due to variable access to quality sanitation and drinking water sources.

Medical assistance commonly required for travellers: Selection of quality providers. Close supervision of medical care. Certain conditions may require evacuation.

● High Medical Risk

Basic emergency services, medical and dental care may be available. Specialist care may be limited even in major cities. A wide range of quality prescription drugs may not be available. Infectious diseases linked to lack of access to quality sanitation and drinking water sources may be common. Communicable diseases may feature in the leading causes of mortality.

Medical assistance commonly required for travellers: Selection of best care available. Close supervision of medical care. Transfer to a higher quality facility. Conditions requiring hospitalisation may require international evacuation.

● Variable Medical Risk

Significant variation of travel medical risk: Quality medical care, medications, emergency services, and dental care are available from selected providers in major cities. Elsewhere: availability of these services may be limited. Similarly, exposure to food, water-borne or potentially life-threatening infectious diseases may vary.

● Extreme (Very High) Medical Risk

Healthcare is almost non-existent or severely overtaxed. There may be very limited or no primary care, emergency care or dental services. Quality prescription drugs are frequently unavailable. Outbreaks of food and waterborne diseases linked to limited quality sanitation, such as cholera, and other communicable diseases may be common.

Medical assistance commonly required for travellers: Selection of best care available. Close supervision of medical care. Transfer to a higher quality facility. All but minor health issues may require international evacuation.

International SOS is a global health and travel security risk services company that provide supports & assistance to organisations and their employees, from over 1,200 locations in 90 countries. It was founded in 1985 and is headquartered in London & Singapore.

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