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An inclusive risk assessment tool for travel and fieldwork

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Travel and fieldwork are integral to the geosciences, and it is usual for students, academics and professionals to need to assess the risks and hazards of a planned trip in advance. In the UK, health and safety law focusses on the idea of a “risk assessment” - a process by which hazards are identified and mitigations are planned to reduce the overall risk of the activity. A recent review of our risk assessment procedures highlighted the need to better consider the needs of a diverse community, including those with “protected characteristics” in UK law. These are defined in the Equality Act 2010 as: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

We present our improved risk assessment forms and suggest some approaches to considering hazards and appropriate mitigations that particularly affect those people with protected characteristics. These include the need to consider how laws and attitudes, such as those towards women, or LGBT+ people, may affect the safety of participants. It is particularly important to address this in the geosciences, where fieldwork is frequently an integral part of teaching and learning activities.