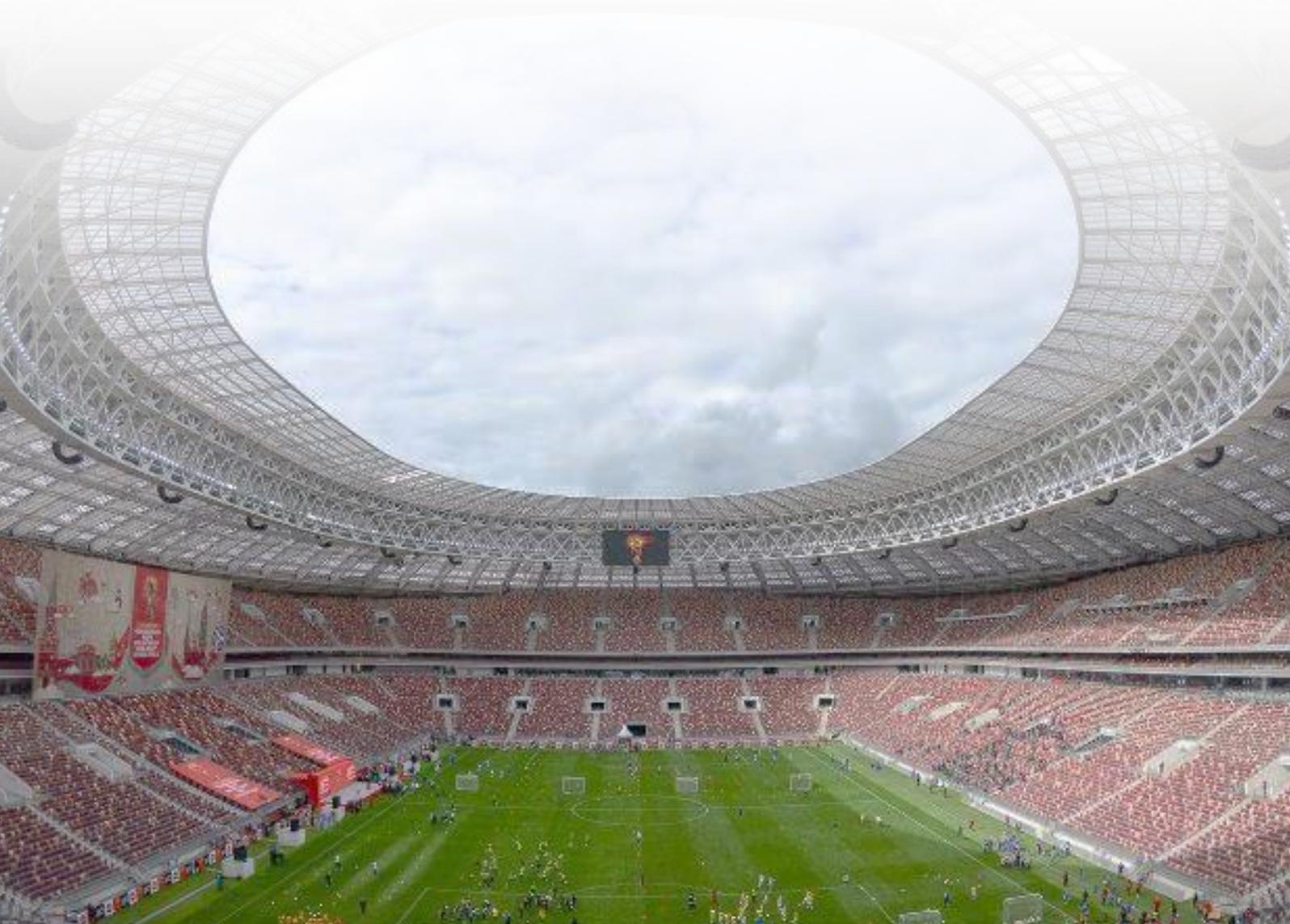


# Security risks at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia

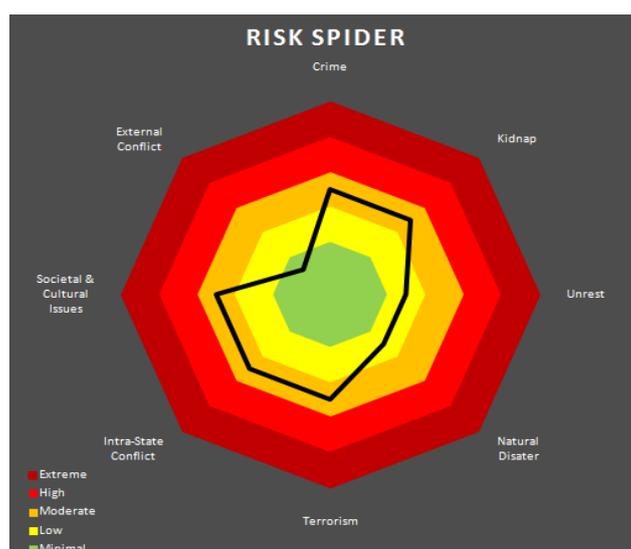


## Introduction

After much anticipation, the 2018 FIFA World Cup will kick off in Moscow, Russia on 14<sup>th</sup> June. Between then and 15<sup>th</sup> July, 64 football matches involving 32 countries will take place in twelve stadiums across eleven host cities in Russia. These cities are Kaliningrad, Kazan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov-on-Don, Saransk, Samara, Sochi, St. Petersburg, Volgograd and Yekaterinburg. The event will draw in spectators from across the globe, with a total of 2.5 million tickets available for the competition. While excitement is building in the run-up to the competition, concerns remain over the safety and security of fans travelling to attend matches in the host cities.

Having hosted numerous international events in previous years, including the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and the 2017 Confederations Cup, Russia is well-versed in coordinating such large-scale events. However, two terrorist attacks in Volgograd in December 2013 in the run-up to the Winter Olympics and racially insensitive displays during the Carnival Sochi Fest in May 2017, prior to the city hosting Cameroon for a Confederations Cup match, demonstrate potential security risks at such events. In addition, this year's World Cup is a much larger competition and covers a greater geographical area, which both broadens and elevates the security risks. This article will explore the key security risks facing fans attending the World Cup and will provide some brief advice to help mitigate these risks.

Healix considers Russia a **MODERATE**-risk country. Russia's security risk environment is multifaceted and can be divided into five broad categories: crime and corruption, terrorism, civil unrest, discrimination and hooliganism. It is important to note that the levels of risk pertaining to each factor differ in each host city. Nevertheless, general patterns remain relevant countrywide.



Model 1: Security risk model for Russia with mapped defined categories.

## Crime and Corruption

**Russia's major cities have historically been hotspots for low-level opportunistic crime and foreign tourists are often attractive targets for criminals.** Pickpocketing, bag snatching, drink-spiking scams, robberies and assaults are not uncommon. While Russia's notorious mafia groups still operate in the major cities, travellers attending matches are unlikely to experience any issues. Organised crime groups have become increasingly clandestine since the 1990's when Russian mafia wars took place on the streets of the major urban centres. Travellers are advised to be especially vigilant of belongings when in busy tourist areas, at transport hubs, at the "fan fests" and in the vicinity of the stadiums. If possible, visitors should carry wallets and purses in the front, inside pocket of jackets or in a securely closed bag.

**Russia has struggled with corruption for decades and is ranked 135th out of 180 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2017.** While large-scale political corruption has made the headlines, small scale corruption in the form of extortion and the soliciting of bribes is prevalent in most cities and has been known to impact tourists. Corrupt law enforcement officials have reportedly looked to extort travellers, especially in key transport hubs. Travellers may be accused of having inadequate documentation on their person and asked to pay a 'fine' to settle the issue. Visitors should carry correct identification and visas on them at all times. If police make false allegations and attempt to extort, ask politely for their law enforcement identification and explain you are going to call the embassy to clarify the situation. This is likely to deter such activities.

## Terrorism

**The risk of terrorism in Russia predominantly emanates from the North Caucasus.** Sunni Islamist extremists and nationalists from this region have carried out numerous attacks across Russia. This south-western region is a stronghold for militant groups attempting to establish an Islamic emirate, and between 2007 and 2015 the Caucasus Emirate was the primary insurgent group. The Caucasus Emirate is responsible for a number of attacks including the 2011 Moscow Domodedovo airport suicide bombing and the 2013 Volgograd transport bombings. However, since 2015, key members of the Caucasus Emirate have pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS), which has led to the rise of IS-affiliated group Wilayat al-Qawqaz. IS has previously threatened to carry out attacks at the World Cup. Accordingly, a credible risk of terrorism remains and travellers are advised to be especially vigilant, in particular

at Luznikhi stadium (Russia's largest stadium), at St. Petersburg stadium, in busy public areas such as queues at the stadium entrance, on public transport and in hotel lobbies. Visitors should move away from and report any suspicious packages or unusual behaviour to the authorities.

## Civil Unrest

**Civil unrest occurs most frequently in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and violence at large-scale rallies is common.**

Unauthorised protests are quickly shut down and met with forceful counter-measures from authorities. On 18<sup>th</sup> March, Russian voters went to the polls to elect the nation's president. Incumbent President Vladimir Putin won his second consecutive and fourth term overall with 77% of the vote. Large-scale protests in the run-up to the polling were common. However, civil unrest since has been less severe. While the risk of civil unrest during the World Cup is lower than during the election period, certain activists and opposition groups may attempt to take advantage of the heightened international media presence during the tournament to promote their cause. While being in crowds will be unavoidable, moving away from protestors should be a priority. Walk at right-angles away from protests, and avoid confrontation with law-enforcement officers.

## Discrimination

**Both verbal and physical discriminatory abuse is a concern within Russia's large urban centres – especially at football matches.** Far-right sentiments and neo-Nazi groups are more prevalent in Russia than in Western Europe.

Homophobia is a significant issue, especially due to a lack of legal protections; in June 2013, Russia passed a bill outlawing 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations'. In addition, members of the LGBT community have been subject to abuse and attacks in many of the host cities. Racially motivated and anti-Semitic abuse has been reported at football matches; African, Afro-Caribbean and Jewish individuals and Central Asian migrants have been targeted in recent years. Travellers from ethnic minorities and LGBT communities should remain aware such behaviour exists; where possible stay with friends and colleagues and look to enter the stadium as soon as possible if feeling uncomfortable outside.

## Hooliganism

**Football hooliganism is highly prevalent in Russia. Russian hooligan groups, most commonly referred to as ‘firms’ and comprising so-called ‘ultras’, are some of the most notorious and violent worldwide.** Firms such as Music Hall, Gladiators Firm ’96, Flints Crew and Orel Butchers are well-organised and highly-trained and have been known to target not only rival firms but also international fans. In 2016, during the UEFA European Championships, ultras from different Russian firms were involved in strategic targeting of England fans. Moreover, a number of such firms have threatened to target British fans during the World Cup. Groups of male supporters should be particularly attentive around the stadium as they are the most likely to experience confrontation. In addition, spectators are advised not to wear local Russian club team shirts when attending the World Cup, as this may spark anger among rival supporters.

## Conclusion

While the risks outlined above may paint a rather bleak picture of the security environment at the upcoming World Cup, it is important to note that the majority of fans are unlikely to be affected by security incidents. Russian cities have been popular tourist destinations for travellers for decades and the majority of Russian citizens are tolerant of visiting tourists. In addition, Russian security forces are well trained and efficient. It is important for travellers to consider the advice given in the above paragraphs, to assist in mitigating security risks. *For more information on stadium and city- specific security risks and Fan ID, and to learn more about Healix Security Services, please contact [GSOC@healix.com](mailto:GSOC@healix.com).*