



## Safety & security while travelling to/in the US

There have been a few really useful guides to safety and security shared in the past few weeks for those travelling to the US. We have taken some of that information and condensed it here.

For those travelling to the US, we strongly encourage everyone to prioritise their personal safety and security at all times. The information provided here is intended as general guidance only and should not be considered legal or professional advice\*. Much of this content may already be familiar to you, but we hope it serves as a useful reminder to plan carefully, stay informed, and travel responsibly.

We know for those travelling with a criminal record this can be especially stressful. While a criminal record does not automatically bar you from travelling to the USA, if you've been arrested or convicted of certain offences, you may be ineligible to travel under the VWP or ESTA programme and will need to apply to the US Embassy for a visa.

The below information is general and broad but offers good advice for all of us making this journey to CSW in New York City in 2026.

### Safety & security information while travelling to/in the US

1. Border officials can search your electronic devices, including potential review of social media and online presence. It is recommended to clean up your devices of any social media apps, transfer any sensitive content to a cloud, and make sure to download a vpn. Try not to have many political stickers on your devices . More tips [here](#).
2. Large international events and protests are highly surveilled. Arrest or police contact can have immigration consequences for non-citizens, which disproportionately affect people (e.g., there is a higher risk for migrants or LGBTQ+ activists).
3. Reflect on what safety means to you. What do you already do to keep your work safe & sustainable? You might want to do a simple risk assessment: threat, likelihood, risk, impact, mitigation. This might be as simple as backing up data and devices before you travel to keeping important items (passport, phone, bank cards) secure and only carrying what is needed.



## Advice for 2026 and the current climate and context

1. Interacting with officials at border control:
  - a. Answer truthfully, but don't volunteer extra information, to avoid follow-up questions.
  - b. If you have a criminal record of any kind and are asked about it, do declare everything: You must disclose any arrest, caution, or conviction from any country, regardless of how long ago it occurred.
  - c. Secondary screening: there may be a long waiting time (e.g., a few hours), so be mentally prepared for this.
  - d. Do not sign any documents that you do not understand or have not read.
  - e. Request to contact your lawyer.
  - f. Memorise at least one emergency number, and inform your travel buddies asap.
2. Your legal rights:
  - a. Rights can vary based on country/citizenship, but could include: the right to remain silent, right to legal representation, right to know the charges, protection from unreasonable search (of yourself and properties), right to medical attention, right to contact support (family, friends), right to fair legal protection.
3. Interaction with law enforcement:
  - a. It is important to remain calm and respectful.
  - b. Know when to speak and when to remain silent (for self-protection).
  - c. Document everything possible (names, badges, time, location, witnesses).
  - d. Request clarity on your status.
  - e. Assess your rights clearly, but not confrontationally.
  - f. Avoid resistance or escalation.
  - g. Have emergency contacts ready.
  - h. Aim for legal observer presence.
4. While attending CSW, out of the airport, in NY:
  - a. It is better to travel in groups than alone, especially at night.
  - b. Do not share your accommodation publicly.
  - c. Don't wear UN badges outside of the building.
  - d. Learn your routes in advance.
  - e. Stay away from protests happening in the city.
  - f. Keep your phone charged and carry a charger at all times.
  - g. Maintain regular check-ins.
  - h. Ask for people's consent before taking and sharing photos.
  - i. Let others know if you don't want to be photographed.

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- j. Disable automatic tagging on your social media.
- k. Don't post about CSW on your social media until you have left.
- 5. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (known as ICE) is not limited to borders, but throughout the city, and may be present around UN buildings. They may ask to show your identity.
- 6. Are we obliged to show IDs if asked on the street? It depends on who is asking: a law enforcement official > yes, the UN badge should be sufficient.
- 7. If you feel unsafe, move to busy traffic places and contact your buddy immediately, using pre-agreed code messages for urgent support. Aim to not travel alone.
- 8. CSW can be demanding, so take care of your wellbeing: Schedule daily rest periods, eat/drink regularly, avoid over-scheduling, and identify rest spaces within venues.
- 9. Returning home: re-assess your risks, in case you have done any activities that might put you at risk in your home country. Heightened risk may happen due to: increased media attention, interviews too critical of home government, shared risk due to association with other activists or projects/government, or solidarity with Palestine.
- 10. Make a landing plan: travel communication (your flight number), journey information, check-in plan (ask someone to take action if they don't hear from you after X hours of your landing), documentation/packing, prepare for speaking to authorities, devices/account security.
- 11. If you are travelling only with an ESTA, is it better to say you travel for tourism?
  - a. It is an option, but better not to lie to an immigration officer! In some cases, they may ask you for more information about your intended tourist visit, and in that case, if you panic, it can escalate quickly. Better to give short answers that are true and not volunteer information you are not asked for.

For more useful information, both general and US specific see these sources:

[A guide on travelling to the US with a criminal record](#)

[General safety tips for NYC](#)

[Immigration guide to the USA](#)

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