

# Support for British nationals abroad: A summary



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

# Support for British nationals abroad

This leaflet provides a summary of our publication *Support for British nationals abroad: A guide*. It highlights some of the ways you can help yourself stay safe abroad and what help we may provide if you do get into difficulty. For more detailed information, please refer to the guide on the website at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications).

## Staying safe overseas

- > Check our travel advice website at **www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice**. Keep an eye on news reports of any problems in the area you are visiting. Follow fcotravel on **Facebook** and **Twitter** for regular updates from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO).
- > Before you travel get comprehensive travel insurance or an overseas health plan, which covers any pre-existing medical conditions you have, and ensure it covers all activities you undertake. If you do not take out proper insurance, you will normally have to pay the costs of any emergency yourself, including expensive medical bills. If you choose to go to a country against our travel advice, this may seriously restrict any help we can provide and may also mean that your travel insurance is not valid.
- > At least six weeks before you go, check what vaccinations and other health precautions you may need to take for your trip. Visit **www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk** for more information. Take any prescribed medicine with you and keep it to hand, as well as a copy of the prescription. However, be aware that some medications (including prescription medications) may be illegal in the country you are visiting.
- > Make sure your passport is valid and in good condition and that you have any necessary visas. Fill in the emergency contact details in your passport.
- > Leave copies of your passport, insurance policy (plus the insurer's 24-hour emergency

number), ticket details, your itinerary and contact details with your family and friends.

- > Take enough money for your trip and some backup funds, such as appropriate travellers cheques, prepaid cash cards or credit cards. Before you leave, find out how you can replace your travellers cheques and credit cards if you lose them, and keep a separate note of their numbers.
- > Before you go, get a good guidebook and get to know your destination. Find out about local laws and customs, and follow them. Be aware of your personal security and take sensible precautions to protect yourself.

## Who we can help

We can provide the support set out in this leaflet<sup>1</sup> to people outside the UK who are:

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK);
- > British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals'), although this will depend on the circumstances;
- > In certain circumstances, nationals of other European Union countries and Commonwealth nationals whose country does not have a local embassy.

We cannot provide support to other countries' nationals, even if they may have been legally living in the UK.

### **Note 1:**

There is no legal right to consular assistance. All assistance provided is at the discretion of the Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

## Where you can find us

Support is provided by British diplomatic or consular missions overseas and by the Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

British diplomatic missions overseas are the British Government's main offices in other countries, usually in capital cities. These missions take the form of British High Commissions or Deputy High Commissions in Commonwealth countries and British Embassies in other countries. British consular staff work in these offices or sometimes in separate buildings called Consulates General or Consulates in capital cities or regional centres. In some places where there are no British diplomatic or consular missions, we have networks of Honorary Consuls, who work on a voluntary basis and can offer some limited help or put you in touch with the nearest British mission. There is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates on our website at **[www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)**.

## If something happens to you in a country where the UK is not represented

If you need consular assistance in one of the few countries where there is no British Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate, you are entitled to ask for help from the Embassy or Consulate of any other European Union Member state. They must provide whatever assistance they would provide to one of their own nationals (which may differ from the assistance we provide to British nationals). For further information about how to access consular assistance in countries where the UK is not represented, visit the European Commission website at **<http://ec.europa.eu/consularprotection/>**.

## What kind of help we can provide

We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, including:

- > Issuing replacement travel documents.
- > Providing information about transferring funds.
- > Providing appropriate help if you have suffered rape or serious sexual or physical assault, are a victim of other crimes, are ill or in hospital.
- > Providing details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors.
- > Doing all we properly can to contact you within 24 hours of being told that you have been detained.
- > Offering support and help in a range of other cases, such as child abductions, death of relatives overseas, missing people and kidnappings.
- > Contacting family or friends for you if you want.
- > Making special arrangements in cases of terrorism, civil unrest or natural disasters.
- > Providing documentary services such as consular birth or death registration, help with marriage or civil partnership documents or providing notarial services as appropriate.

## We cannot:

- > Help you enter a country, for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid; *because each country can decide who they allow into their country and (outside the EU) no country has any obligation to explain their decisions to the British Government.*
- > Ensure your safety and security in another country; *because such issues are the responsibility of the government and authorities of that country.*
- > Give you legal advice or translate documents, although we can give you details of people who may be able to help you in these cases, such as English-speaking lawyers or professional translators/interpreters; *because such support is best provided by independent professionals and we do not have the funding or the expertise to provide such specialist services.*
- > Carry out searches for missing people; *because doing so is the responsibility of the local authorities and to search effectively requires the resources that only local authorities can provide.*
- > Investigate crimes, get you out of prison, prevent the local authorities from deporting you after your prison sentence, or interfere in criminal or civil court proceedings; *because we cannot interfere in another country's processes, and must respect their systems just as we expect them to respect the UK's laws and legal processes.*
- > Get you better treatment in prison than local prisoners (although we may raise concerns with local authorities if treatment falls below internationally recognised standards) or get you better treatment in hospital than the

treatment that is given to local people; *because we cannot interfere in another country's processes just as we would not accept such interference in the UK.*

- > Pay any bills or give you money from public funds; *because we are not funded to do this and it is the obligation of individuals to take responsibility for themselves. It would be unfair for those who take out insurance to subsidise those who do not.*
- > Make travel arrangements for you, or find you work or accommodation, or make business arrangements on your behalf; *because these are private arrangements which are your responsibility to make for yourself.*
- > Get involved in private disputes over property, employment, commercial or other matters; *because we are in no position to judge the facts and have no jurisdiction overseas to resolve such matters.*

## **Crisis response**

Some crises involving British nationals abroad may need exceptional levels of response beyond what is described in *Support for British nationals abroad: A guide*. It is not easy to define in advance what these circumstances might be, but they might be the result of natural disasters or large-scale accidents, civil unrest, terrorism or conflict.

In some circumstances, there may be limits to the assistance we can provide in a crisis – please take sensible precautions, read and follow advice provided and take responsibility for your own safety first. This applies particularly if you are travelling to or living in a high risk location for terrorism, unrest or natural disasters. We have a duty of care to our employees and we will not send our staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk.

## What is a crisis?

There are three broad types of incident which could require a crisis response:

- > An incident in which large numbers of British nationals may have been killed or injured, or which continues to pose a danger to British nationals. This includes terrorist attacks, major transport accidents, major pandemics and natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis.
- > Civil or political unrest which causes us to advise you to leave the country and which might eventually require the assisted departure or evacuation of British nationals.
- > Events which – whilst not generally threatening lives – cause disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals. This includes incidents such as volcanic ash, the collapse of travel companies and major airport shutdowns. In such incidents, the FCO might provide exceptional help and assistance to those affected.

Some examples of the extra help we can provide in a crisis are to:

- > Send extra staff to the country involved to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground;
- > Work with local authorities to establish if British nationals have been involved and provide information and support to those who have been affected;
- > Set up an information hotline in the UK.

## When our job is over

We offer support to distressed British nationals abroad, and to their families either in the UK or elsewhere, to deal with the immediate effects of what has happened to them. In certain exceptional cases, our officers may be involved in a particular case for a longer period of time. For example, if a British national dies in suspicious circumstances, we will try to provide their family with as much information as the local investigating authorities provide us with, if we are permitted to share it.

But sometimes, people need long-term support in areas where our staff are not trained professionals, such as support from bereavement counsellors or investigative officers. Although we cannot provide this or similar long-term help ourselves, we can suggest where you can go for guidance. This may mean going to another UK government department, such as the Humanitarian Assistance Unit in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (**[www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Supportafteramajorincident/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Supportafteramajorincident/index.htm)**). Or, it may mean getting in touch with a nongovernmental organisation or charity.

## Important notes

Our publication *Support for British nationals abroad* sets out the help which we aim to provide to British nationals who are in difficulty overseas. It does not cover the work undertaken by other government agencies, such as issuing passports (Identity and Passport Service) or visas (UK Border Agency). There is more information about these services on our website at **[www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)**. We provide the support described in this guide in over 180 countries across the world in different and sometimes difficult conditions. Local factors such as security, the law, transport, medical facilities and relations with the local authorities, as well as the circumstances of each individual case and the resources available, may all affect the help we can provide. Equally there may be some occasions – for example, a natural catastrophe – where we cannot provide the usual kinds of help, or where we provide extra help when the Foreign Secretary has agreed to us doing so. And, like any government department, we have a responsibility to use public funds efficiently and effectively. If you are not happy with the support we have provided, you can make a complaint.

## Our values

**We set high standards for the support we can provide.**

The *Consular Customer Charter* is available on the gov.uk website **[www.gov.uk/government/publications/consular-services](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consular-services)**.



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

## Tell us what you think!

### Giving us feedback

**We welcome your views on the support we provide.** They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. Visit **[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research)** for our customer satisfaction survey, or ask your local Embassy or Consulate for a copy. Information about our official complaints procedure is also on this website.

If you prefer to contact us directly our contact details are:

#### Consular Directorate

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

Email: [feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk](mailto:feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk)

**Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500**

This leaflet is a summary of what you can do to stay safe abroad and where we can help. Further information and a copy of the Support for British nationals abroad: A guide is available on our website **[www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)**



**[www.gov.uk/fco](http://www.gov.uk/fco)**

© Crown Copyright 2013

The contents of this publication are correct at time of printing (March 2013).

Printed on recycled paper containing a minimum of 75% post consumer waste and 25% ECF pulp.