

Support for British nationals abroad: A guide



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Our Customer Charter

This Charter sets out our commitment to providing a high level of service to you and what we ask from you in return.

We will:

- > Be professional, non-judgemental, polite and helpful to you whatever your sex, race, age, colour, sexuality, disability, religion or whatever circumstances you find yourself in.
- > Protect any personal information you give us in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- > Tell you beforehand if there is a charge for a service we provide.
- > Deal with your enquiry accurately and efficiently, explaining clearly from the start what help we can give and when you should approach others for advice.
- > Give clear information at our premises and on our website on how to contact us, and make arrangements for you to contact us in an emergency outside office hours.
- > Use your feedback, comments and complaints to help us improve our services.

What We Ask from You

- > Treat our staff with respect. If you are abusive, we may refuse to help you.
- > Be prepared to pay for some services e.g. an emergency travel document. We do not make a profit from these charges; they go towards the costs of providing consular services.
- > Give us feedback so that we can improve our services. To do so, please speak to a member of staff or visit www.fco.gov.uk/consularfeedback to complete our short customer satisfaction survey or to send us a complaint.

...and please follow our tips below for travelling or living overseas:

- > Buy full travel and medical insurance to help cover any unexpected costs.
- > Have any necessary vaccinations, pack enough medication to cover any unforeseen extended stays or emergencies and leave your contact details and itinerary with family or friends.
- > Follow our travel advice www.fco.gov.uk/travel and local advice on what is safe and unsafe, respect local laws and take care of your money and passport (not forgetting to include your emergency contacts on the inside back cover).

We have a duty of care to our employees. We will not send staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk.

For more information on the services and support we provide, please speak to a member of staff or visit www.fco.gov.uk/travel

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Summary

This guide highlights some of the main ways you can help yourself stay safe abroad and what help we can provide if you do get into difficulty.

Staying safe overseas

- > Check our travel website on **www.fco.gov.uk/travel** or call 0845 850 2829 (24hrs, 7 days a week. Networks charges may vary). 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). (See page 7)
- > 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. (See page 7)
- > At least six weeks before you go, check with your doctor what vaccinations and other health precautions you may need to take for your trip. 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. (See page 8)
- > 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. (See page 8)
- > 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. (See page 8)
- > 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. (See page 9)

- > 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. (See page 9)

Who we can help

We can provide the support set out in this guide¹ to people outside the UK who are:

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK – see page 5);
- > British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals' – see page 5), 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. (See page 5)

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

How we're funded

Consular assistance provided to British nationals overseas is not funded by the UK tax payer. It is funded by a small premium included in the price of every British passport, costing the passport holder less than £2 a year. The remainder of our income comes from the fees we charge for documentary, notarial and certain assistance services.

Fees are calculated based on the cost of our global consular operation so that every British national pays

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.

the same fee for the service they use no matter where they are in the world. The fees are approved by the Privy Council and laid before Parliament.

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 they 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 this guide, as set out on pages 23-27. 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.

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.

Our values

We set high standards for the support we can provide.

The Consular Customer Charter can be found at the beginning of this guide, and sets out our commitment to providing a high level of service to you and what we ask from you in return.

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). Or, it may mean getting in touch with a non-governmental organisation or charity.

Important notes

This document 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.fco.gov.uk.

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 (see page 28).

Who we can help

We can help you if you are either travelling or living abroad and are a British national.

You are a British national if you are one of the following:

- > A British citizen
- > A British Overseas Territories citizen²
- > A British overseas citizen
- > A British national (overseas)³
- > A British subject
- > A British protected person

See the appendix for definitions of all these categories. We cannot help non-British nationals, no matter how long they have lived in the UK and what their connections are to the UK. We may also help nationals of other European Union Member States without a local embassy or consulate. We may also help Commonwealth nationals in non-Commonwealth countries where they do not have any diplomatic or consular representation, but will normally ask their nearest embassy to provide any ongoing assistance required.

Note 2:

We provide the same help to British Overseas Territories citizens living or travelling outside the Overseas Territory as we do to any other British national in difficulty.

Note 3:

We cannot help British nationals (overseas) of Chinese ethnic origin in China, Hong Kong and the Macao Special Administrative Regions. The Chinese authorities consider British nationals (overseas) of Chinese ethnic origin as Chinese nationals, and we have no power to get involved in mainland China. However, we provide the same help to all British nationals (overseas) living or travelling outside China, Hong Kong and Macao as we do to any other British national in difficulty.

What about dual nationals?

If you have some connection with a foreign or Commonwealth country – for example, by birth, by descent through either parent, by marriage or by residence – you may be a national of that country as well as being a British national. You should check with the authorities of any other country you are connected with.

You may have certain responsibilities with that country, such as compulsory military service. Becoming a British national may not cause you to lose your original nationality.

If you are a dual British national in a third country (that is, a country of which you are not a national) and hold a valid British passport, we will offer you our full support.

If you are a dual British national in the country of your other nationality (for example, a dual US-British national in the US), we would not normally offer you support or get involved in dealings between you and the authorities of that state. We may make an exception to this rule if, having looked at the circumstances of the case, we consider that there is a special humanitarian reason to do so. These circumstances might include cases involving minors, forced marriages or an offence which carries the death penalty. However, the help we can provide will depend on the circumstances and the country of your other nationality agreeing to it.

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. For the rest of this document, we have used 'British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate' to mean all British missions overseas. There is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.

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 set out in this Guide that 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/>

There are no British Consulates in the British Overseas Territories. British nationals visiting or resident in the British Overseas Territories should contact the local authorities if they are in difficulty in these Territories.

There are also informal arrangements with some other countries, including New Zealand and Australia, to help British nationals in some countries. If other countries provide help on our behalf, you should receive the same level of help as they would give to their own nationals.

Our duty of care to our staff

Like any organisation, we have a duty of care to our employees. We will not send staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk.

Many people need our support at a time of great personal distress or anxiety. Our staff will always try to be sensitive and as helpful as possible. Please remember that staff may be dealing with a number of difficult cases at any one time. Please also remember that our staff cannot replace specialist advisers such as counsellors or lawyers. Please treat our staff fairly and with respect. If you are physically or verbally abusive, our staff may refuse to continue to help you.

Staying safe overseas

British nationals take millions of trips overseas every year, most of which pass without any kind of incident. And many British people live overseas without experiencing any difficulties. However, it is important to remember that outside the UK:

- > You are less likely to be familiar with local conditions and the legal framework. There may be language barriers.
- > You may be more exposed to a wide variety of risk and threats, such as crime and fraud.
- > Support which you could freely get in the UK may not be available or may be very expensive.

So, to stay safe and secure abroad, and to be prepared in case things go wrong, it is important to take a few simple precautions before you go and while you are there. These should include the following:

Before you go

- > Our travel advice provides information and advice to help British nationals make informed decisions about their safety abroad (see www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call 0845 850 2829). This includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-Western or British demonstrations, lawlessness, violence, natural disasters, epidemics, and aircraft and shipping safety. We review the information in our travel advice regularly and update it following any significant incident that might affect British nationals visiting or living in the area. In a developing crisis we update the information much more regularly and, if necessary, several times a day⁴. We will also publish

Note 4:

The purpose of our travel advice is to provide information and views to help British nationals form their own judgements about travelling to or working in a particular country. While we take every care when preparing our travel advice, we cannot accept any responsibility, including legal responsibility, if you read the travel advice and choose to take it into account when making any decisions relating to a particular country. Neither the UK Government nor any member of British consular or diplomatic staff abroad can accept legal responsibility for any injury, loss or damage caused as a result of anything set out in our travel advice.

information on www.facebook.com/fcotravel and twitter.com/fcotravel. Our travel website also contains important general information on safety abroad, under the heading 'Staying safe and healthy abroad'. You should also keep an eye on the news for reports of any problems in places that you plan to visit.

- > Always make sure that you have full travel insurance. Anyone travelling within the European Economic Area⁵ or Switzerland should also get a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which entitles you to some reduced or free emergency care. However, you will still need travel insurance. You can apply for an EHIC at post offices, by phone on 0845 606 2030, or online at www.ehic.org.uk⁶. If you are going to live abroad, find out whether the UK has a social security agreement with the country where you plan to live and what services are covered. For more information, check the Department for Work and Pensions' website (www.dwp.gov.uk). Unless your employer provides a healthcare plan, you should consider

Note 5:

The European Economic Area is made up of all members of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Note 6:

We are not responsible for the content of other organisations' websites and cannot accept any legal responsibility for any information they give you.

private healthcare plans to cover treatment in the country where you live. It would be unfair for public funds to be used to pay for people who have not taken out insurance, whether going on holiday or going to live overseas, and you should remember that the costs of, for example, a medical emergency abroad can be very expensive. See www.fco.gov.uk/travel for more information about travel insurance..

- > Make sure that your insurance is up to date and valid for the entire trip and that it covers everything and everyone who is travelling. Check exactly what is covered – for example, personal injury as a result of terrorist activity, cover in the event of a natural disaster, cover for all the activities you want to do (including any dangerous sports), all your luggage and equipment, medical and legal costs. You should also look carefully at exemptions to the insurance policy, including any relating to pre-existing medical conditions, or alcohol and drugs. Some policies do not cover personal injury as a result of terrorist activity or loss in the event of a natural disaster. Be sure to tell your insurer about any pre-existing medical conditions you may have, including any psychiatric illness. The policy may not be valid if you fail to do this, which could mean that you or your family and friends have to pay for any treatment. Remember to take the policy number and the 24-hour emergency number with you.
- > Make sure that all your vaccinations are up to date and find out about any other suggested medical advice by visiting your healthcare provider. Follow this advice and be aware of possible health risks during your trip. See www.dh.gov.uk, www.nathnac.org/travel and www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk for more information or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647. Pack enough supplies of any medication that you are taking in your hand luggage. You should keep your medication in its original packaging and take any prescription documents with you. In some countries, medicine that you were given over the counter elsewhere may be illegal. Check with the nearest embassy of the country you are going to (which may be based in London or another European city) that your medication will be legal in that country and find out whether you will need to take a doctor's letter with you. For longer trips, visit your dentist and optician before travelling.
- > At the back of your passport, fill in the contact details of two relatives or friends who can be contacted in an emergency. Apart from your passport, take another form of identification with you (preferably one with a photograph, such as a driving licence).
- > Whether you are travelling or living overseas, you should have the details of your nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate with you. In the event of a crisis in which British nationals may be involved, we provide advice and travel updates on www.fco.gov.uk/travel as well as on our **Facebook** (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and **Twitter** (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites. You can also obtain Smartphone apps which provide information on British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates, travel updates and news.
- > Make sure you are aware of the immigration and customs controls of the country you are travelling to, including any necessary visas. For some countries, your passport needs to be valid for at least six months after the date you travel. You should contact the embassy or consulate of the country to which you are travelling for information about the immigration requirements of that country. It is your responsibility to make sure you have the correct visa for your stay in another country. If you are experiencing difficulties entering a country (for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid), consular staff will not be able to help you enter the country. They cannot get involved in another country's immigration policy or procedures. See www.ips.gov.uk or call the UK Passport Adviceline on 0300 222 0000 for information about how to get a passport.
- > Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back. Leave an itinerary and details of where you might be able to be contacted during your time abroad. You should also make two copies of your passport (including pages with relevant visas), insurance details and any other important travel documents. Leave one copy at home with a family member or a reliable friend and take one copy with you, packed separately from your passport.

- > Take enough money for your trip and some back-up funds, such as travellers cheques (if appropriate), cash or credit cards. Before you leave, check that your cards are valid, and find out how you can replace them and your travellers' cheques if they are lost or stolen. Keep a separate note of their numbers and of the number you would need to ring to stop any credit cards if they are lost or stolen.
- > Buy a good travel guide that includes basic information on local laws and customs. Talk to your travel agent or tour operator about possible risks.
- > If you are planning to drive, make sure your UK driving licence is current and valid. Make sure you know the driving laws, licence requirements and driving conditions in the country you are visiting. In some countries you will need to have an international driving permit as well as your UK licence. Never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs and be aware that other countries will have different laws relating to the amount of alcohol that you can legally consume. Be aware that in many countries there are on-the-spot fines for traffic offences. For more details, see the 'Driving abroad' page on our website at www.fco.gov.uk/drivingabroad.

Special considerations

Travel can be tiring and difficult for everyone, but some travellers may want to plan trips with particular care. As well as the above general information, some travellers may have to take account of other considerations depending on their circumstances. These travellers might include:

- > women travelling alone
- > Hajj pilgrims
- > young travellers
- > backpackers and independent travellers
- > cruise travellers
- > travellers for weddings and civil partnership ceremonies overseas
- > gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender travellers
- > travellers with disabilities.

These travellers may want to consult our travel website (under 'Travel advice relevant to you') for checklists of some of the things they might want to take into account when planning trips overseas.

When you are there

- > Be aware of security and take sensible precautions. Leave your jewellery and valuables at home if you can. Only carry as much money as you need for the day. Leave the rest, and at least one credit card, in the hotel safe if one is available. Keep copies of your passport, insurance details and other important travel documents separate from the originals. It is useful to always have some form of identity on you, such as a driving licence or a photocopy of your passport. Stay aware of what is going on around you and keep away from situations where you do not feel comfortable. Find out from your guidebook or tour guide about any local scams. Keep up to date with local and regional events in the media. Don't take risks on holiday that you wouldn't take at home. If a situation looks dangerous, it probably is.
- > Keep a note of the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate phone number (see www.fco.gov.uk/travel for details about the country you are visiting). When you arrive, find out how to get in touch with the local emergency services in case you need them during your stay.
- > A passport is a valuable document, and you are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to protect it. You may face delays or difficulties at immigration if you return to the UK without a passport, and should not try to travel on a driving licence or a local police report. While we can usually issue replacement emergency travel documents overseas for a fee (see page 14), if you repeatedly lose your passport while overseas we may need to interview you for security purposes before issuing a replacement. In certain circumstances, we may need to restrict the validity of a replacement passport. We will explain this to you in full at the time of application.
- > Stay in regular touch with your family and friends in the UK, especially if you are travelling alone or in a remote area, or if you are aware of a terrorist attack or other crisis in the region in which you are travelling. Although you may feel perfectly safe, people at home may worry if they don't hear from

you, and could report you missing. If you take your mobile phone with you abroad, make sure you have international roaming (the facility to use your phone on a foreign network), and an adaptor so that you can recharge your battery.

- > There may be very serious penalties for breaking a local law which might seem trivial to you or for doing something which may not be illegal in the UK. And something that you do abroad (e.g. bribing a local official) might render you liable for prosecution in the UK. It is an offence for a British national or someone who is ordinarily resident in the UK, to pay a bribe anywhere in the world. This includes people travelling for work, business or pleasure. If we have reason to believe a bribe has been paid by a person or company with a close connection to the UK, then we are required to notify the Serious Fraud Office.
- > Do not overstay your visa or work illegally – you may be fined or sent to prison.
- > Hobbies that involve using cameras and binoculars, such as bird watching or plane spotting, may be misunderstood (particularly near military sites). Filming or photographing demonstrations may also be seen as provocative in some countries. If in doubt, don't do it.
- > Respect local customs and behave and dress appropriately, particularly when visiting religious sites, markets and rural communities. Travel guidebooks, tour operators and hotel staff are all useful sources of information. If in doubt, take extra care. In some places, behaviour that would be acceptable elsewhere can lead to serious trouble. In some countries, it can also be worth asking for permission before taking any photographs so as not to cause offence.
- > Help protect local wildlife and habitats by respecting rules and regulations (including how to get rid of rubbish properly). Be aware that buying any wildlife products is risky. Customs departments throughout the world confiscate illegal souvenirs, and in the UK you could face a criminal prosecution and fines.
- > Check that what you are bringing back to the UK is legal. You can get more information from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website (www.defra.gov.uk/) or call them on 08459 335577 (+44 (0) 207 238 6951 from outside the UK) about bringing back meat, animal products or plants. You can get information about banned and restricted goods, and your customs allowances, from HM Revenue & Customs (see www.hmrc.gov.uk/index.htm or call 0845 010 9000).
- > Be aware of local attitudes to alcohol and know your own limit. Keep your drinks with you at all times as they could be spiked with drugs to make you more vulnerable to assault or rape. Be aware that accidents are more likely to happen after drinking alcohol or taking drugs. In such cases avoid swimming and take particular care on balconies or other high places. If you have an accident or injure yourself while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it is unlikely that your insurance policy will cover you.
- > Be aware of what may happen if you become involved with drugs overseas. Not only are there health risks, but there may also be severe penalties for any association with drugs. Pack your own baggage, fasten it securely and do not leave it unattended. Never carry packages through customs for other people and be cautious about accepting gifts. Take sensible precautions when crossing borders and customs points in someone else's vehicle. If in doubt get out and make your own way through. You should not lend your vehicle to other people.
- > Follow health advice (as mentioned on page 8). You should, for example, drink plenty of safe drinking water, use sunscreen, and take care what you eat and where you eat it.
- > We have lists of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors that are available on British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites. We aim to check the accuracy of these lists at least once a year⁷.

Note 7:

Neither the Government nor the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can make any guarantee in relation to the professional ability or character of any person or company on the list, nor can they be held responsible in any way for you relying on any advice you are given. We welcome any feedback on the people and companies listed.

If you are going to live abroad

Going to live abroad is a major decision and you should get a wide range of information and advice to help you plan and make sure the move goes smoothly. British nationals who live overseas can receive the same support as visitors. Our travel advice and British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites provide useful information about living abroad, as well as providing contact details for government and other organisations in the UK and overseas.

Some of the main things to consider before you go

- > Check relevant websites for information. For example, our website (www.fco.gov.uk/travel), the website of the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the country you are moving to, the website of the embassy in the UK of the country concerned, and www.direct.gov.uk (under 'Britons living abroad').
- > Find out about the healthcare system, including costs, and get a full health plan. Many countries do not provide government-funded healthcare and your eligibility for treatment under the NHS may change. However, you might be entitled to healthcare paid by the UK, but this will depend on whether you live abroad permanently, or only work outside the UK for a set period and whether or not you receive a UK state pension or other UK benefits. For further information see NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/movingabroad/Pages/Introduction.aspx.
- > Consider taking out health insurance to cover private medical and dental treatment, as well as the costs of being brought back to the UK for medical treatment. Travel insurance will, in many cases, not provide enough cover if you plan to live overseas and may be invalid if you move abroad permanently. Useful websites for more information include www.direct.gov.uk and www.ageuk.org.uk.
- > Find out about welfare rights abroad. Some UK benefits are not paid outside the UK. Others apply only in countries which have agreements with the UK (for more details, see www.dh.gov.uk). Tell your social security office, HM Revenue & Customs' National Insurance Contributions Office (International Services) and the Department for Work and Pensions when you move abroad and give them your contact details. You should also tell them if you change address again or return to the UK to live.
- > Remember that British nationals generally must have lived in the UK for five years to be entitled to income-related UK benefits. This may affect you if you have to return to the UK for any reason. You can find more information about the 'habitual residency test' on the Department for Work and Pensions' website or the Citizens Advice website (www.citizensadvice.org.uk).
- > Be clear about your financial situation and allow for changes to the exchange rate and inflation. Find out about tax liability in the UK, social security benefits and National Insurance contributions, and get a State Pension forecast. Useful websites include www.dwp.gov.uk and www.hmrc.gov.uk. You should also make a will. Remember that you may need a will for any property or possessions in the UK and a separate will for any property and possessions you hold abroad.
- > Make sure that your car complies with local regulations and that you have the necessary driving permit. We cannot help you export or import your car or personal belongings.
- > Learning the language can make daily life much easier.
- > Research schools and education opportunities. Contact the country's local education authorities to find out about the education system.
- > Check whether you can continue to vote in UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections. See www.aboutmyvote.co.uk for details.
- > It is important you have a valid passport (fill in the details of two relatives or friends on the back page) and any necessary visas.

Buying a property abroad

- > If you are thinking of buying a property abroad – buy with CARE: go into it with Caution, make sure you seek Advice – local laws can be complex and unclear; do your own Research and then Evaluate on the basis of that before you proceed. Use an independent lawyer when buying property. Our websites provide lists of local English-speaking lawyers. We cannot give you legal advice or get involved in purchases or disputes.
- > If you are considering buying property abroad you should research thoroughly in advance. Property laws and customs may be different from those in the UK. British nationals can run into problems with ownership rights due to these differences.
- > You should engage an independent local lawyer. A list of English-speaking lawyers is on each British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate website. You should deal only with established and reputable estate agents or with other contacts that you know to be reliable and genuine. You should make all payments within bank premises and/or through banking channels.
- > Timeshare ownership is well established in many countries, with respected companies, agents and resorts operating legally and fairly. However, you should beware of timeshare companies offering incentives (including stock market investments and discounts on airfares and accommodation) when exchanging existing time-share ownership or taking out membership of holiday clubs. If you are approached by agents operating such schemes, treat them with caution.
- > Useful contacts for people looking to buy property overseas:

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)

The Association of International Property Professionals (AIPP)

If you are retiring overseas

- > Contact associations or charities for advice. Age UK (www.ageuk.org.uk) and www.direct.gov.uk have advice on planning and preparing for your move abroad, as well as what to do and who to contact if things don't go according to plan. Organisations such as Saga (www.saga.co.uk) can provide information on what it's like to live overseas.

- > Get independent tax advice about the implications of living overseas.

Some of the main things to consider when you arrive

- > Register with the local authorities. This may give you access to the local welfare services. In some countries you may need to apply for a residence permit within a set period soon after you arrive.
- > Give your friends and family, and authorities such as HM Revenue & Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions, your new address and tell them if it changes in the future.
- > Open a foreign bank account. If you are retiring, your pensions can be paid into your bank account direct in many countries.
- > Contact British associations, clubs and charities, as these can help you settle. Lists are usually available from the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in your area.
- > You can find more information in our leaflet, 'Going to live abroad', which is available on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

What our Embassies can do

There is information on all our British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites about living in that country. But remember: our Embassies can only do so much. It's your responsibility to find a place to live, support yourself financially and find a school for your children. You can subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate **Facebook** (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and **Twitter** (twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts, to receive realtime travel advice updates.

> Notarial services

British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates may offer certain notarial and legalisation services to British or foreign nationals. For more information about these services and related charges consult the Embassy, High Commission and Consulate websites at www.fco.gov.uk, or contact the Embassy, High Commission or Consulate directly.

> **Marriage, civil partnership, birth and death**

Although there is no legal requirement for it to be done, most British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates can register overseas births or deaths of British nationals on production of the locally issued birth or death certificates. They may also help if you are getting married or entering into a civil partnership abroad and can give you information about depositing marriage or civil partnership certificates with the General Registry Office. Further information can be found on British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites or www.fco.gov.uk/bmd.

Remember!

You should have full travel insurance for your trip, or healthcare and other appropriate cover if you are living abroad. The Government cannot cover medical costs or refund you for lost property.

There is a charge for some types of consular support. This is to help cover the cost of providing support worldwide. We do not make a profit from these charges. A full list of our consular fees is available at www.fco.gov.uk.

Crisis

We may offer additional help in a crisis (see page 23-27), but please remember the following:

- > Whether you are travelling or living overseas, you should have the details of your nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate with you. In the event of any crisis, we provide advice and travel updates on www.fco.gov.uk/travel as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and **Twitter** (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites. You can also obtain Smartphone apps which provide information on British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates, travel updates and news.
- > Travel advice updates will include information on whether registration by British nationals is needed. Please follow the guidance in these updates.
- > It may take some time to get help to you if the infrastructure has been affected by the crisis (for example, if telephone lines are down, if bridges have collapsed or if access to roads has been blocked). Access may also be impossible if the local authorities have sealed off the area where you are.

If something happens to you

This section describes the range of support and information we can normally offer if things go wrong. If you are caught up in a crisis, a different level of support may be available – for more details, see pages 23-27.

If you have anything stolen

- > If your money, passport or anything else is stolen abroad, report it to the local police immediately and get a statement about the loss (you will need one to claim against your insurance).
- > You will need to cancel any credit cards or travellers cheques. You may also want to have your bank or a relative send money to you using a reliable money transfer company. Our staff can give you information about this if you need it.

Lost or stolen passports

- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad and you urgently need to travel, we can issue a replacement travel document once we are satisfied of your identity and that you are a British national. You will need to produce a police report (if your passport has been stolen), fill in an application form and pay a fee.
- > A replacement travel document may take time and could mean you have to delay your travel arrangements. You should make sure that your travel insurance covers you if this happens.
- > Out of hours, we will normally only issue a replacement travel document in a genuine emergency, where not to do so would cause genuine hardship. Inconvenience or a small financial loss are not reasons for issuing a travel document out of hours. An out of hours call out fee will be charged. Before you contact us, consider whether you will also need an exit visa from the local immigration authorities. Some countries do not issue these visas outside normal office hours.

Financial help

- > If you run out of money abroad, we can give you information on how to transfer money and we can help you to contact relatives and friends who may be willing to transfer money to you or to buy you a ticket back to the UK. If we transfer money on your behalf, we will charge you for this.
- > We cannot provide money to family or friends, for example if you have had to go into hospital, to help with their travel or accommodation if they visit you.
- > We are not funded to provide emergency financial assistance. It is important that you have full travel insurance as we cannot pay your bills. If you don't have travel insurance, you will be liable for any costs you are charged. A discretionary loan from public funds to help you return to the UK may only be considered in very exceptional circumstances and only if you have completely used up all other methods of getting funds. You will have to sign an 'undertaking to repay' the loan, and will need to show that you have a UK address and the ability to pay back the money. In most cases, you will have to secure this loan by giving up your passport to our staff, who can issue you with an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to the UK, the cost of which will be added to the loan and repaid later. We will not return your passport to you, and the UK Identity and Passport Service will not issue you with a replacement passport, until you have repaid the loan in full. It is up to us to decide whether we grant these loans – a lack of other ways for you to return to the UK does not mean that we will automatically agree to a loan. For suggestions about how to help yourself if you have financial problems overseas, see the 'Travel money' section of our travel website www.fco.gov.uk/travel.

Victims of crime overseas

- > We can give general information about local police and legal procedures. We cannot give you legal advice, but we can point you in the right direction of where to get it.
- > If you need medical treatment, we can help you to contact a local doctor.
- > If you want us to, we can contact your relatives and friends and let them know if something has happened to you. We can only offer you financial help in line with our policy set out in the 'Financial help' section of this guide.
- > We cannot collect evidence or investigate crimes ourselves. In many countries investigating authorities and the courts may refuse to answer enquiries from other people and organisations, including consular staff. You should consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court, and follow any trial for you. We can give you a list of local English-speaking lawyers and interpreters. We would not normally attend a court case involving a British national and we cannot influence the outcome of any trial.
- > Back in the UK, you may feel you would benefit from extra support to help you cope with the effects of the crime. Organisations such as Victim Support may help (www.victimsupport.org).
- > If you are injured in a violent crime in another EU country, you may be able to apply for compensation from that country with the help of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (see www.cica.gov.uk or call 0800 358 3601).
- > We have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad', which offers more detailed information. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

Victims of rape or sexual assault overseas

- > We take any report of rape or sexual assault seriously and will try to see you to offer you support as soon as possible and in private. We aim to be polite, patient, sensitive and non-judgemental. In most cases of rape and sexual assault, the victims, no matter what their sex, prefer to talk about their ordeal with women. If that is what you want, we will do our best to make sure that a female consular official is present at any meeting.
- > We can tell you about local police and legal procedures. If you want to contact the police, we can come to the police station with you. If possible, we can ask that you are interviewed by a female police officer if that is what you would prefer. If you want us to, we can give you a list of local lawyers and interpreters. However, only you can decide whether or not to report the crime to the police or take legal action – we cannot make this decision for you. Remember that if you choose not to report the crime immediately but change your mind later, forensic and other evidence may be lost. Also, in some countries, you must report the crime before returning to the UK if you want it to be investigated.
- > We can help you to deal with the local authorities to arrange a medical examination by a female doctor, if possible and if that is what you would prefer. Depending on local conditions and laws, we can also arrange for you to see a doctor who can give advice on sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, and on pregnancy or abortion.
- > If you want us to, we can contact your family or friends.
- > We can give you information on what professional help is available locally and in the UK, both for you and for your family. We can consider asking for the services of a sexual offences trained officer from your local police station to advise and help you.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Rape and sexual assault overseas' with more information. You will find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

British nationals who go into hospital overseas

- > We aim to contact you within 24 hours of being told that you have been admitted to hospital.
- > We do not usually contact or visit people who have travelled specifically for medical treatment.
- > If you are in hospital as a result of an assault or other crime, we will visit you as soon as possible.
- > In all other cases, we will take account of factors such as your condition, your ability to speak on the phone, whether you have relatives or friends with you, whether you have a tour company representative and the standard of medical facilities before deciding whether a visit is appropriate. If we believe a visit is appropriate and there is a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the same city as the hospital you are in, we aim to visit you within 48 hours of being told that you have gone into hospital.
- > If you want, we can contact your family or friends in the UK to tell them that you are in hospital.
- > If you want, we can help you to consult your insurance company or medical evacuation company. Remember to keep any receipts or doctors' notes in case you need them to make a claim. We may also be able to help you communicate with hospital staff if they do not speak English.
- > If you are travelling within the European Economic Area⁸ or Switzerland, you should carry a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which will entitle you to medical treatment at a reduced cost, or free of charge in some cases. If you normally live in the UK, you can apply for the EHIC at any point, even after medical treatment has become necessary or started (see www.ehic.org.uk).
- > We cannot pay medical bills.

Note 8:

The European Economic Area is made up of all members of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway

Mental Health

- > Facilities and resources available to those experiencing mental health issues, as well as the understanding of these issues, vary in different countries.
- > Where appropriate, we will do our best to help you find support and advice wherever you are.
- > If you need medication, we can provide information on prescribing and dispensing doctors or chemists. We are unable to provide and pay for specialist mental health help, advice or medical supplies.
- > If you want, we can contact your family and friends in the UK.
- > If you need hospital treatment overseas for a mental health issue and receive treatment in the UK, we will try to help overseas and UK medical staff to contact each other. Our aim is for relevant information to be shared between those treating you, so that you can receive ongoing support if you return to the UK.
- > Having travel insurance can be very helpful in providing payment for medical treatment. However, there are occasions where it becomes invalid - for instance, if a pre-existing condition is not declared or if the policy does not cover mental health needs. In these cases, you or your family must pay for any treatment.
- > We have a leaflet called 'No Health Without Mental Health' with more information. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

Forced marriage of a British national abroad

- > In a forced marriage you are coerced into marrying someone against your will. You may be physically threatened or emotionally blackmailed to do so. It is an abuse of human rights and cannot be justified on any religious or cultural basis.
- > If you are a British national in the UK and are worried about being forced into a marriage abroad, you should contact our Forced Marriage Unit by e-mail to fm@fco.gov.uk, by phone on 020 7008 0151 or, outside office hours, by phoning our switchboard on 020 7008 1500. Anything you tell us will be treated in complete

confidence. It is essential that you think carefully before deciding whether to travel to the country concerned. For more information see our website: www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

- > If you are overseas and fear that you are going to be forced into a marriage you should try to contact, or preferably go to, the nearest British Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate. You will find contact details in local phone books, hotels and tourist offices, or on our website at www.fco.gov.uk. If you cannot get there, we can still try to help you, within the limits of local law.
- > We can try to help you return to the UK, if that is what you want. If possible, we may also try to find you temporary accommodation in the country you are in.
- > If you have been forced into a marriage and are being forced to sponsor a visa, we may be able to help you. Call us on 020 7008 0151.
- > We have a leaflet called 'What is a forced marriage?' with more information. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

- > If you are arrested or held in custody or prison overseas, the authorities in that country should ask you whether you want them to contact the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. However, you can also ask for this to be done, and should do so particularly if you are charged with a serious offence.
- > We will aim to contact you, depending on local procedures, within 24 hours of being told about your arrest or detention. If you want us to, we will then aim to visit you as soon as possible.
- > We can put you in touch with Prisoners Abroad, a UK charity which supports British citizens detained overseas and their families (www.prisonersabroad.org.uk).
- > Our staff are there to support you and to take an interest in your welfare. We aim to be sensitive and non-judgemental. We also aim to treat everyone in prison or detention the same, no matter what they are being held for, or whether they are on remand or have been sentenced. You should stay in touch with our staff and ask for their help, as they have experience in dealing with many of the problems you may face.
- > But, we cannot get you out of prison or detention, nor can we get special treatment for you because you are British.
- > If you want us to, we can tell your family or friends that you have been arrested. If you are thinking about not telling your family, please consider the distress it may cause them if they are not told where you are. It can also be a disadvantage to you if you need money for anything in prison or fall ill. Once we have told your family and friends, we can pass messages between you if phone or postal services are not available.
- > Although we cannot give legal advice, start legal proceedings or investigate a crime, we can offer basic information about the local legal system, including whether a legal aid scheme is available. We can give you a list of local interpreters and local lawyers if you want, although we cannot pay for either. It is important to consider carefully whether you want to have legal representation and to discuss all the costs beforehand with the legal representative.
- > We can offer you information about the local prison or remand system, including visiting arrangements, mail and censorship, privileges, work possibilities, and social and welfare services. We can also explain where there are different regulations for remand prisoners and sentenced prisoners. For example, in some countries, prisoners are allowed to send more mail when they are on remand.
- > If appropriate, we will consider approaching the local authorities if you are not treated in line with internationally-accepted standards. This may include if your trial does not follow internationally-recognised standards for a fair trial or is unreasonably delayed compared to local cases.

- > We can also help to put you in touch with the charity Fair Trials International (www.fairtrials.net).
- > With your permission, we can take up any justified complaint about ill treatment, personal safety, or discrimination with the police or prison authorities. Again, with your permission, we can make sure that any medical or dental problems you might have are brought to the attention of any police or prison doctor.
- > If you are in prison in a European Union country, or in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, the USA, Australia or New Zealand, we aim to visit you once after sentencing and then after that only if there is a real need. In other countries, while you are in prison we aim to visit you at least once a year, although we may visit you more often if necessary.
- > Within certain limits, we can send you money from your family. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service. In some countries, depending on the rules of the prison where you are being held, we can help to buy essential items with money sent by your family, friends or other people.
- > We may be able to give you information about any local procedures for a prisoner's early release in exceptional circumstances. These procedures are generally known as pardon or clemency. We will only consider supporting pardon or clemency pleas:
 - in compelling compassionate circumstances, such as where a prisoner or close family member is chronically ill or dying and this would leave no-one to care for dependants;
 - in cases of minors imprisoned overseas;
 - as a last resort, in cases where we have evidence that seems to point to a miscarriage of justice.
- > We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. If you are facing a charge that carries the death penalty, or if you have been sentenced to death, we will normally raise your case at whatever stage and level we judge to be appropriate. We can also put you in touch with the charity Reprieve (www.reprieve.org.uk), who work to prevent the execution of any British national detained overseas.
- > We can explain to you how you may be able to apply to transfer to a prison in the UK if you are in a country from which prison transfers are possible. We have a leaflet called 'Transfers home for prisoners abroad' with more details.
- > The local authorities may have a policy of deporting foreign nationals after they have completed a prison sentence and we cannot prevent them from doing this, even if you had previously lived in the country before your prison sentence.
- > You should be aware that if you are arrested for certain serious offences, such as child sex abuse or drugs crimes, our staff must tell other relevant UK authorities⁹.
- > We have a leaflet called 'In prison abroad' with more information. You will find more details of this leaflet, and the one on transfers, on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

If you are subject to a travel ban

If you are subject to a travel ban, i.e. prevented from travelling or leaving the country for whatever reason, we may be able to offer assistance. For example, we can:

- provide you with a list of local lawyers;
 - provide you with information about any organisations that may be able to help;
 - contact family and friends in the UK on your behalf if you are unable to do so easily.
- > We may also consider approaching the local authorities, taking into account factors such as local law, the reason for the ban, and your personal circumstances.

Note 9:

We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.

If something happens to a relative or partner

This section explains what support we aim to offer the partners or relatives of a British national who dies or suffers some other serious misfortune abroad. There may be a different level of support if the person affected has been caught up in a crisis (see pages 23-27).

Next of kin and representatives

- > When we are told about an incident involving a British national abroad, we will try to contact the person's family as soon as possible.
 - > However, we cannot normally pass on information to relatives if the person involved asks us not to – for example, if they have been arrested but do not want their family to know about this.
 - > To help us provide information as efficiently and securely as possible, you should appoint a single family representative who we can deal with as the case continues. As far as possible, we will make sure that you have a single point of contact with a member of our staff.
 - > In cases of death abroad, we will normally deal only with the next of kin or the person nominated to act on their behalf in relation to the funeral or dealing with the belongings of the person who has died.
 - > If there is an ongoing investigation overseas, we can ask a local UK police force to use a family liaison officer (FLO) to advise and help you to deal with the investigation. The relevant UK police force will make the final decision as to whether an FLO is appointed.
- about the death first from the media, although we cannot always influence this. In exceptional circumstances, this may mean having to tell you about the death over the phone. We do not release the name of someone who has died to the media before we have told the next of kin.
- > Consular staff in London can pass on to our staff overseas your wishes about dealing with the body. We will do our best to make sure that these wishes are carried out. However, post-mortem examinations may be carried out by the local authorities without your permission. In some countries, organs may be removed and kept during these procedures without you being informed or consulted.
 - > If you want us to, we can tell you the cost of local burial and local cremation (where local authorities allow these for foreigners) or of transporting the body and personal belongings back to the UK (known as 'repatriation'). You should be aware that, in some countries, a lack of suitable storage may make it impossible to get the necessary international certificates to transport the body. While we cannot pay any burial, cremation or repatriation expenses ourselves or settle any debts, we can help transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs. If you want us to, we can provide lists of local and international funeral directors. If an English speaking firm is not available, our staff can help you with the arrangements.
 - > In the case of a crisis or terrorist attack, local practices overseas may change, and there may be delays with bodies being returned to the UK due to identification procedures.

Deaths abroad from natural causes

- > If the person who died was travelling with a tour company, the company will often contact you, as the next of kin, themselves. If the death of a British national abroad is reported to us, and you are not present, we will ask the UK police to tell you as soon as possible. If you are not in the UK, we will ask our consular staff in the country where you are to do this. We will do everything we can to make sure that, as next of kin, you do not hear

- > All deaths must be registered in the country where the person died. We can advise you how to do this. You will need documents about you and the person who has died, including, for example, the full name, date of birth and passport number of the person who has died. The local authorities will need to be told if the person suffered from an infectious condition, such as hepatitis or HIV, so they can take precautions against infection.
- > You do not have to register a death at the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. However, by doing so, you can get a UK-style death registration document, and a permanent copy of it will always be available in English from the General Register Office in the UK. In Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland and South Africa, British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates cannot currently register deaths but the local certificates are suitable for British purposes.
- > A consular death registration document is not a UK death certificate and should not be used as one. It should not take the place of the locally issued death certificate. You'll need to register the death with the foreign civil authorities and obtain a full foreign death certificate before you can apply for consular death registration. The consular death registration document will not include a cause of death as many foreign death certificates do not include this detail.
- > In the UK there are a number of organisations that can support and help bereaved families and friends to understand their grief and come to terms with their loss. Useful websites include www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk and www.samaritans.org.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Death overseas', which you can find on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.
- > A coroner in England and Wales will normally hold an inquest if a person died a violent or unnatural death overseas and the body is returned to the coroner's district. Different procedures for investigating deaths apply in each part of the UK. We have a booklet called 'Guide for bereaved families', which you can find on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.
- > We can also offer basic information about the local police system and legal system, including any legal aid that is available. We can provide lists of local lawyers and local interpreters (although we do not pay for either) and, where possible, details of support groups. In all cases where you, as next of kin, have concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death, we suggest you get professional legal advice.
- > We cannot investigate deaths ourselves and, in many countries, investigating authorities and the courts may refuse to answer enquiries, including from British consular staff. In these circumstances, it is very important to consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court and follow any trial for you.
- > We will consider making appropriate representations to the local authorities if there are concerns that the investigation is not being carried out in line with local procedures; if there are justified complaints about discrimination against the person who has died or their family; or where we judge that a local delay or decision creates significant distress for the bereaved, ensuring that we do not interfere in the investigation or judicial processes in that country. However, we cannot interfere in the investigation or judicial processes in that country. You should be aware that the standard of investigative procedures and expertise varies greatly across the world.

Death of a British national abroad in suspicious circumstances

- > As well as the support we can offer if someone dies from natural causes, where there is evidence of suspicious circumstances we can suggest the best way to raise concerns with the local authorities.

- > Consular staff in London are available to meet family representatives. They can contact you if the investigating authorities tell us about any new developments. Where possible, if you visit the country during the early stages of the investigation and initial court hearings relating to the death, our staff there may be able to meet you.

- > Where legal systems differ significantly from the UK, or proceedings are conducted in a language you do not understand, we may help to arrange, and attend, an initial round of meetings with the authorities. And we may accompany you to the first day of a trial and verdict.
- > There are a number of organisations in the UK that can help bereaved families and friends come to terms with their loss, whether the death was natural or otherwise. Where the death was a result of murder or manslaughter, if you wish, we will put you in touch with the Victim Support National Homicide Service, who will allocate a named caseworker to give you free and confidential help. Charities such as Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM) Abroad, (www.sammabroad.org.uk) can help you face the problems and difficulties that arise from a death overseas under suspicious circumstances.
- > We also have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad' which you may find helpful. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

If a relative or friend has been detained or held in prison overseas, we can give the following support.

- > If your relative or friend has asked us to, we will tell you as soon as we can that they have been detained or held in prison. However, to protect their privacy, we will not normally provide any details of the detention or arrest, or tell you how to contact them, unless they have given us permission.
- > We can provide general information about the country involved, prison conditions and the local legal processes.
- > We can put you in touch with the prisoners' welfare charity, Prisoners Abroad (see www.prisonersabroad.org.uk or phone 020 7561 6820).
- > If the prison where your friend or relative is being detained agrees, we can, within certain limits, pass on any money you want to send to them to buy prison 'comforts', use the phone and so on. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service.

- > You should be aware that, in many countries, mail the prisoner sends or receives will be opened and read by the authorities, and phone conversations may be monitored.

Missing people

- > If you are in the UK and worried about a British national who you think is missing abroad, we can tell you how to make a missing persons report for your local police so that Interpol enquiries can begin.
- > Although we cannot carry out physical searches on your behalf, we can give you information about appropriate local authorities. We can also give you contact details for any relevant local charitable and voluntary organisations specialising in tracing missing people. Where appropriate, we can give you information about the federation or association of any local private detective agencies.
- > If you want, consular staff in London can meet family representatives, maintain contact with you and tell you about any new developments which we find out about.
- > We can put you in touch with Missing Abroad (www.missingabroad.org) who may offer further advice and guidance.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Missing persons abroad' which you may find helpful. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

British nationals kidnapped or taken hostage overseas

- > If a British national is taken hostage overseas, we will try to do everything we properly can to make sure they are released safely. Where we can we will work with the government in that country, which will take the lead in dealing with the situation.
- > We will not make substantive concessions to hostage takers. Substantive concessions would include paying a ransom, changing government policy or releasing prisoners.

- > A dedicated team in London will act as caseworkers for the family and will make sure that you are kept up to date with the situation as far as possible. In some cases, British police may appoint a family liaison officer. If this happens, our team will work closely with the local police force involved.
- > If appropriate, we can also put you in touch with other specialist agencies such as Hostage UK (www.hostageuk.org).
- > When a British hostage is released, we will meet them and help them make contact with you. If necessary, we can help them to:
 - find local accommodation;
 - arrange a medical check-up;
 - arrange travel to the UK.

International parental child abduction

- > If you are worried about your child being abducted overseas by the other parent or a relative, you should contact our Child Abduction Section on 020 7008 0878 (or our Global Response Centre on 020 7008 1500 outside office hours).
 - > If your child has been abducted, we can tell you whether the country which your child has been taken to has signed the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. If it has, we can put you in touch with the relevant authorities in the UK so that you can submit a Hague application requesting the return of your child.
 - > If the country to which your child has been taken has not signed the Hague Convention, and you cannot come to an agreement with the other parent, you may need to apply for custody and permission to bring your child back to the UK through the courts overseas. We can give you a list of English speaking lawyers in the country. Some may be specialists in family law. However, we cannot pay any legal fees ourselves or offer legal advice. Where appropriate, we can ask consular staff overseas to contact the local courts to express an interest in a case and ask about progress. We cannot, however, interfere in foreign court proceedings.
- > We can give you basic practical information about the customs and legal procedures of the country to which your child has been taken. We can also provide travel information and, if necessary, offer guidance on finding accommodation locally. We can help you contact the relevant local authorities and organisations when you are overseas.
 - > If you want us to, we can contact the relevant UK police force to ask about progress in tracing your child and whether Interpol is involved. If your child is found, and if the other parent agrees, we may be able to arrange a consular visit to check on your child's wellbeing if the country's government cannot offer this facility. If you do not know where your child is we can try to verify with immigration whether your child has arrived in a particular country. We can also contact the relevant authorities overseas to check what progress has been made in finding him or her if a parent has reported their child missing with the police overseas.
 - > If you are both willing, we can pass information between you and the other parent about your child. Grandparents may also be involved in custody cases, for example, where one parent has died. You should be aware that, in some countries, local law can favour the paternal grandparents (the father's parents) over the mother. That makes it even more important to have formal residence arrangements in place before giving permission for the child to leave the UK.
 - > We can put you in touch with the reunite International Child Abduction Centre [www.reunite.org/](http://www.reunite.org) for further advice and guidance.
 - > We cannot 'rescue' a child, help to remove them illegally from where they are staying, or illegally facilitate their return to the UK.
 - > We have a leaflet called 'International parental child abduction' (with more general information) and a separate leaflet on 'Parental Child Abduction and the UK-Pakistan Protocol' (with details of an agreement with Pakistan about handling these cases). You will find details on our travel website www.fco.gov.uk/publications.

If you are affected by a crisis overseas

This section outlines the principles of our assistance package during a crisis, including what you can expect from us and what we expect from you.

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.

Who we can help in a crisis

In a crisis we can provide the support outlined in this section to people outside the UK who are:

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK - but see page 5);
- > British nationals with another nationality - 'dual nationals';
- > In certain situations, other eligible persons including: nationals of other European Union member states and Commonwealth nationals who do not have an Embassy of their own to turn to; family members of British nationals (i.e. spouse/partner and dependent children aged 18 years and under only – we cannot assist other family members);
- > We cannot provide support to other countries' nationals, even if they may have been lawfully living in the UK.

What kind of help and assistance we can provide in a crisis

Due to the exceptional nature of crises, it is impossible to predict every eventuality. The advice below is not exhaustive but rather, it is an outline of the principles we follow when assisting British nationals and other eligible persons in a crisis.

Incidents in which large numbers of British nationals may have been killed or injured or which continue to pose a danger to British nationals

These include terrorist attacks, major transport accidents, major pandemics and natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis. Such incidents are – unfortunately – the most common type of crises with which we deal. Our main focus is always on establishing the facts of the incident so we can provide rapid support to any British nationals – and their families – who may have been killed or injured.

How we may help you

- > Work with local authorities – including hospitals and police – to establish the facts of the incident and if British nationals have been involved. This is our first priority in any crisis – but it can take time as we are extremely careful to ensure our information is accurate to avoid causing unnecessary distress for families.
- > Support British nationals injured in a crisis incident.
- > Support British nationals trying to leave the affected area or get in contact with their families to tell them they are safe.
- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on www.fco.gov.uk as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > Deploy expert teams to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff, if required. Alongside FCO consular experts these teams can include experts from the British Red Cross and the UK Police Disaster Victim Identification teams.
- > Set up an information hotline in the UK, if required.
- > Support the families of any British nationals killed in an incident – in particular around the repatriation of bodies to the UK.
- > Support families of victims coming out to the scene, including meeting them at the airport, arranging and attending meetings with local authorities or providing information on local accommodation options.

- > Ask for – and listen to – feedback on how you think we performed. Please complete our **customer satisfaction survey** (www.fco.gov.uk/consularfeedback)

What we ask from you

- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. You should be aware that your insurance may no longer be valid if you do not follow our travel advice.
- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts, to receive realtime travel advice updates.
- > Take out adequate travel insurance if a tourist. Expatriates should assess and consider the risks against any personal or corporate insurance policies.
- > If you are working overseas, familiarise yourself with your own employer's evacuation and crisis policies, particularly in high risk destinations.
- > In some situations, to agree to pay back any costs we incur on your behalf (e.g. travel costs, travel documents, cash advances) by signing an Undertaking to Repay form.

Terrorist Attacks

We have put in place Exceptional Assistance Measures for the victims of terrorist attacks abroad, and their families, to take account of the exceptional nature of terrorism in which individuals are random victims of attacks directed at society as a whole. See www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Press&id=414470682 for information.

The details and availability of this assistance will vary according to the particular circumstances of each situation, and it can only be provided as a last resort, if the costs are not covered by existing insurance policies, employer schemes, the government of the country involved or other sources.

- > We will not provide this financial assistance if victims have travelled against our travel advice.

Pandemics

- > During a pandemic we will, as far as possible, continue to deliver a consular service for British nationals resident or travelling overseas through our network of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates. But this may be limited, depending on the scale and severity of the situation. In extreme cases we may have to close our Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates. Some countries might close their borders, international transport could be severely disrupted or halted, and travel could become medically inadvisable. We will not be able to repatriate British nationals during a pandemic.

Civil or political unrest which causes us to advise you leave the country

- > If a country is facing civil or political unrest, our priority will be providing clear information to British nationals and advice on whether to leave the country. We will do this through our travel advice and other media (news networks, Facebook, Twitter)
- > In very exceptional circumstances we may organise an assisted departure, charter flights or an evacuation. However, the situation on the ground may mean that our ability to do so is very limited, particularly in countries where we have been advising departure for some time.

How we may help you

- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on www.fc.gov.uk as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > If required, deploy expert teams to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground.
- > Set up an information hotline in the UK, if required.
- > Set up an information desk at the airport or closest point of safety, if required.
- > In some circumstances, organise an assisted departure where we help you to access transport or we provide additional transport to supplement existing options, so that you can leave a country in line with our travel advice.

- > In some circumstances, we may organise charter flights to supplement existing transport options or support evacuation efforts.
- > In the event of an evacuation provide transport to an appropriate place of safety. You should be aware that this is usually to a third country and not to the UK.
- > Charge a reasonable fee for seats on charter flights which we would ask you to repay at a later date (you will be asked to sign an Undertaking to Repay form), given that those who leave earlier will have paid for their seat on scheduled flights.
- > In exceptional circumstances, use military aircraft or vessels to evacuate British nationals, when all other transport options have been exhausted or do not exist.
- > Work closely with other countries to make best use of charter flights and military transport where appropriate.

What we ask from you

- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. You should be aware that your insurance may no longer be valid if you do not follow our travel advice.
- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts.
- > Leave the country at the earliest opportunity, in line with our travel advice. This may be complex if you are a permanent resident with family or business interests in the country. However, if you do not, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to assist you to leave the country at a later stage.
- > Keep your passport up to date. If your immediate family members¹⁰ are not British nationals ensure that they have valid and up to date travel documents for the country of their nationality. During a crisis, UK passport or visa services may be extremely limited, which could make leaving with your non-British national family members more complicated.

Note 10:

Spouse/partner and dependent children aged 18 years and under

- > Agree to pay a fee (by signing an Undertaking to Repay form) if we provide travel documentation and/or organise charter flights or other transport options as part of an assisted departure or evacuation.

Events causing disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals

These events (volcanic ash, shutdown of airports due to weather or protests, collapse of travel companies) are generally not life-threatening. But they can cause massive disruption. In these incidents our priority is to work with airlines, airports, travel companies and the local authorities to provide British nationals with clear information about the situation, their rights and options. We also support British nationals who are experiencing serious health problems due to the disruption.

How we may help you

- > Liaise with tour operators and commercial airlines to give you the best possible information about their response to incidents which cause significant disruption to travel.
- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on **www.fco.gov.uk** as well as on our Facebook (**www.facebook.com/fcotravel**) and Twitter (**twitter.com/fcotravel**) travel advice sites.
- > Deploy expert teams to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground, if required.
- > Set up an information hotline in the UK, if required.
- > Set up an information desk at the airport or other border points, if required
- > Help British nationals suffering serious medical problems as a result of the disruption to access medical treatment or medication.
- > If a British national is running out of money abroad, provide information on how to transfer money and help them contact relatives and friends. In these incidents we will not make payments to British nationals from public funds.

What we ask from you

- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. If you do not our ability to help will be limited.
- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (**www.facebook.com/fcotravel**) and Twitter (**twitter.com/fcotravel**) accounts, to receive realtime travel advice updates;
- > Find out if your holiday is ATOL protected and what your rights are in the event that your tour operator or travel company collapses before or during your holiday (see **www.caa.co.uk** for more information).

Support after a crisis

- > We provide support to British nationals abroad. But often, victims of a crisis overseas or their families need further help when they return to the UK. We work with support organisations at certain UK airports (Heathrow Travel Care, Gatwick Travel Care, Manchester Chaplaincy), to look after victims' immediate needs on arrival in the UK. The Humanitarian Assistance Unit in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will work with the relevant agencies and services to help victims to get the care they need. Information about the DCMS' Aftercare assistance can be found at **www.direct.gov.uk/helpafterincident**.

Support for British nationals who are not ordinarily resident¹¹ in the UK

- > If you are a British national returning to the United Kingdom after living abroad, or if you are a British national but have never lived in the UK, you may not be automatically entitled to state benefits, a state retirement pension, free NHS hospital treatment or assistance with higher education fees. To be eligible for any of these, a British national must meet certain residence requirements and/or make the appropriate National Insurance contributions. British nationality or past/present payment of UK taxes and National Insurance contributions are not taken into consideration when establishing residence.

Useful sources of information

- > DirectGov website, which has information on benefits, employment, tax and education: **www.direct.gov.uk**.
- > Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on a wide range of subjects, including state benefits, housing, legal matters and employment. Citizens Advice Bureaux are open to everyone: **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.
- > Information on the exemption from charge categories for NHS hospital treatment can be found at the Department of Health website: **www.dh.gov.uk**
- > State education is free in the United Kingdom for British nationals between the ages of 5 and 18. For further information, visit the Department of Education website: **www.education.gov.uk**.

Note 11

Concept of ordinarily resident in the UK: someone who is living lawfully in the United Kingdom voluntarily and for settled purposes as part of the regular order of their life for the time being, with an identifiable purpose for their residence here which has a sufficient degree of continuity to be properly described as settled.

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. Please look at the FCO website (<http://www.fco.gov.uk/consularfeedback>) for our customer satisfaction survey, or ask your local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate for a copy.

Official complaints procedure

There are three stages to our complaints procedure:

1. If you are not satisfied with the service we provided and want to make an official complaint, please write in the first instance to the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate (all addresses and e-mail addresses are available on our website).

If you have dealt with staff based in the UK, or are not sure which British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate to direct your complaint to, please write or send an e-mail to:

Customer Services Policy
Consular Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Phone: 020 7008 1500

Fax: 020 7008 0426

E-mail: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

- > We will investigate your complaint fully.
- > We will do our best to give you a full reply within 20 working days. If we cannot give you a full reply within this time, we will tell you when we expect to do so.

2. If you are not content with the initial reply to your complaint, then please write to the Director Consular Services at:

Consular Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Phone: 020 7008 1500

Fax: 020 7008 0426

E-mail: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

The Director will see all complaints. They will ask for an investigation to be carried out by a member of staff who is not directly connected to your case or to your complaint. This person will usually be senior to any officer against whom a complaint has been made.

- > We will record and examine complaints, and use the information to help make sure we offer the best possible help and support.

3. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive from us, you can write directly to either a Foreign Office Minister or your Member of Parliament (MP), asking them to raise your complaint with us.

- > If you have made your complaint through your MP and are still not happy with the reply that we have given, you can contact the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will normally only consider cases relating to 'maladministration' (that is, poor administration or applying rules incorrectly). There are more details about this on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk.

Appendix

Categories of British nationals

Most British nationals are British citizens. All British citizens have the right to live in the United Kingdom, and are also European Union nationals.

However, there are other categories of people who also fall within the heading 'British national'. All can receive the support explained in this guide. They are as follows.

British Overseas Territories citizens (BOTC)

(formerly British Dependent Territories citizens). Most are entitled to British citizenship (including the right to live in the UK) since the introduction of the British Overseas Territories Act 2001. The exceptions are those with a connection to the Sovereign bases of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus.

British overseas citizens (BOC). In general terms, BOCs originally gained British nationality through a connection with a former British territory that has since become independent. In most cases, a BOC did not qualify for nationality of the newly-independent country, so they kept British nationality when the country gained independence.

British nationals (overseas) (BN(O)s) are people who were formerly British Dependent Territories citizens who gained their status from a connection with Hong Kong. They were allowed to register as BN(O)s before Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997, and to keep BN(O) status after that.

British subjects (BS) fall into two categories – people who were British through connection with Ireland when it was part of the UK (before 1949), and people whose original claim to British nationality was through connection with former British India. The Indian and Pakistani citizenship laws were more restrictive than had been expected, with the result that a lot of people who were expected to become Indian or Pakistani did not qualify. These people were able to keep their status as a British subject, on what was intended to be a temporary basis, until they gained another citizenship. British subjects connected with Ireland are European Union citizens.

British protected person (BPP) status is similar to status as a BOC, except that their connection was with a former British Protectorate, Protected State or Trust Territory. It is not a citizenship, as such, and BPPs are not Commonwealth citizens, but they are British nationals and so can receive our help and support.



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Our publications include:

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Death overseas

Disabled travellers

Going to live abroad

Guide for bereaved families

In prison abroad

International parental child abduction

Parental Child abduction and the UK-Pakistan protocol

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Visiting friends and family checklist

What is a Forced Marriage?

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www.fco.gov.uk/travel