

Have you got what it takes?

Providing international police assistance

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Important facts

UK policing has a worldwide reputation for excellence and for bringing progressive policing practices to the international arena. Our core principles of policing by consent, working with communities and equality before the law are highly valued by other countries.

International police assistance provides opportunities for the UK to promote the development of robust, democratic police services around the world and reduce harm to the UK. It does this by helping to tackle organised crime, terrorism and illegal migration at its source.

UK officers are routinely involved in a range of international assistance work, including carrying out training in areas such as command, forensics and intelligence; secondments to EU, UN and NATO peace support operations in countries including Kosovo and Afghanistan; and other activities to share best practice and build relationships to improve policing at home and abroad.

Any requests made to a police force in England and Wales to assist a foreign police force or international organisation must be approved by the appropriate police authority. From November 2012, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) will be asked to approve these requests on the basis of recommendations from the chief constable.

Background

Why does the UK provide assistance to international organisations and foreign policing agencies?

Illegal migration, drug trafficking and money laundering are all cross-border activities. The most effective way of protecting the UK from these activities is to help tackle organised crime and terrorism in the country of origin.

International police assistance is central to the UK's broader 'Building Stability Overseas' strategy, which supports our national security and international development priorities.

The International Police Assistance Board (IPAB)

The senior cross-departmental International Police Assistance Board (IPAB), chaired by a chief constable, sets the strategy for UK police assistance overseas. The board considers whether requests for assistance are in line with the UK's international objectives.

The role of PCCs and the Home Office

Forces in England and Wales intending, or being asked, to provide assistance to an international organisation or a foreign government or policing agency will need the approval of their police authority (from November 2012 their PCCs) and the Home Secretary, under section 26 of the Police Act 1996.

If an overseas visit is connected with UK police work, for example, officers travelling abroad to investigate an offence committed in the UK, this authorisation is not needed.

Who pays for international assistance?

When we provide police assistance to another country, the funding comes from the country concerned or funding organisations alongside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Chief constables and PCCs will need to be satisfied that costs will be recovered before deciding to provide assistance.

How does providing assistance to a foreign police force or international organisation benefit an individual force in the UK?

UK police officers take up many different roles when deployed overseas. For example, they may provide mentoring, monitoring or advice to foreign police commanders at a strategic level. These roles are often highly influential and provide a valuable set of experiences. Officers often have a highly developed understanding of cultural sensitivities, may have advised foreign police forces and governments at the highest levels, and operate in challenging conditions. When the officers return, the skills they have gained are easily transferable to the UK community they serve. The ability of UK police officers to vary their policing style to suit different communities brings benefits to the UK.