



Support for British nationals abroad: A summary



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Support for British nationals abroad

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

Staying safe overseas

- > Check our travel advice website at **www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice** and subscribe to email alerts. Keep an eye on news reports of any problems in the area you are visiting. Follow fcotravel on **Facebook** and **@FCOtravel on Twitter** for regular updates from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO).
- > Before you travel get comprehensive travel insurance, 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 bills and medical evacuation back to the UK. If you choose to go to a country against our travel advice, this may seriously restrict any help we can provide and may also mean that your travel insurance is not valid.
- > At least six to eight weeks before you go, check what vaccinations and other health precautions you may need to take for your trip. Visit **www.nhs.uk/Livewell/travelhealth** for more information. Take any prescribed medicine with you in its original packaging and keep it to hand, as well as a copy of the prescription. However, be aware that some medications (including prescription medications) may be illegal in the country you are visiting.
- > Make sure your passport is valid and in good condition and that you have any necessary visas. Fill in the emergency contact details in your passport.

- > Leave copies of your passport, insurance policy (plus the insurer's 24-hour emergency number), ticket details, your itinerary and contact details with your family and friends.
- > Take enough money for your trip and some backup funds, such as appropriate travellers cheques, prepaid cash cards or credit cards. Before you leave, find out how you can replace your travellers cheques and credit cards if you lose them, and keep a separate note of their numbers.
- > Before you go, get a good guidebook and get to know your destination. Find out about local laws and customs, and follow them. Be aware of your personal security and take sensible precautions to protect yourself.

Who we can help

We can provide the support set out in this leaflet¹ to people outside the UK who are:

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK);
- > British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals'), but normally not in the country of their other nationality;
- > Nationals of European Union Member States without a local embassy or consulate (in accordance with EU Directive 2015/637);
- > In certain circumstances, Commonwealth nationals whose country does not have a local embassy.

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

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 are usually British High Commissions or Deputy High Commissions in Commonwealth countries, and British Embassies in other countries. Consular staff sometimes also working separate buildings called Consulates General or Consulates.

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 to British nationals or put you in touch with the nearest British mission.

There is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates on our website at www.gov.uk/fco.

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. You should receive the same level of help as they would give to their own nationals. For further information about how to access consular assistance from other EU countries, visit the European Commission website at <http://ec.europa.eu/consularprotection/>.

There are also informal arrangements with some other countries, including New Zealand and Australia, to help British nationals in some countries.

British nationals in the British Overseas Territories should contact the local authorities if they are in difficulty in these Territories, as there are no British Consulates.

What kind of help we can provide

We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case. Our staff overseas will make an assessment of your vulnerability and the needs you have, based on who you are, where you are, and the situation you are facing. They will aim to offer assistance which helps meet these needs.

The help we offer can include:

- > Issuing replacement emergency travel documents.
- > Providing information about transferring funds.
- > Providing appropriate help if you have suffered rape and 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.
- > Providing details of other organisations that can provide specialist support where we are unable to.
- > Contacting family or friends for you if you would like us to.
- > Making special arrangements in cases of terrorism, civil unrest or natural disasters.

- > Providing documentary services such as consular birth or death registration and help with marriage or civil partnership documents.

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 this is 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, 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 resources only they 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.*
- > Make travel arrangements for you, or find you work or accommodation, or make business arrangements on your behalf; *because these are private arrangements which are your responsibility to make for yourself.*
- > Get involved in private disputes over property, employment, commercial or other matters; *because we are in no position to judge the facts and have no jurisdiction overseas to resolve such matters.*

Our response to a crisis

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

In some circumstances, there may be limits to what we can do 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 or living

in a high risk location. 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.

The types of incident that we may need to treat as a crisis are described in *Support for British Nationals Abroad: A Guide*.

What kind of help we can provide in a crisis

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

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

When our job is over

We offer support to British nationals in difficulty abroad and to their families (either in the UK or elsewhere) to help them deal with the immediate effects of what has happened.

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 the information local investigating authorities give us if we are permitted to share it. But sometimes people need long-term help in areas where our staff are not trained professionals, such as support from bereavement counsellors or investigative officers.

Although we cannot provide this help ourselves, we can suggest where you can go for guidance. This may mean going to another UK government department 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 (Her Majesty's Passport Office) or visas (UK Border Agency).

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 our assessment of how vulnerable you are, may all define 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 our doing so. And, like any government department, we have a responsibility to use public funds efficiently and effectively.

Generally, there is no legal right to consular assistance. All assistance provided is at our discretion.

Our values

We will be professional, non-judgemental, polite and helpful to you whatever your gender, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religion or belief.

Our Consular Customer Charter sets out our commitment to providing this service to you. It also sets out what we ask from you in return. You can see the Charter at the start of Support for British Nationals Abroad: A Guide.



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Tell us what you think!

Giving us feedback

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

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

Consular Directorate

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Email: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

Tel: +44 (0)20 7008 1500

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



www.gov.uk/fco

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