

Support for British nationals abroad: A guide



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Our Customer Charter

This Charter sets out our commitment to provide a high quality service, and what we ask from you in return.

We will:

- > Be professional, non-judgemental, polite and helpful to you whatever your gender, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religion or belief.
- > Give clear information on how to contact us.
- > 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.
- > Keep waiting times to a minimum when you call or visit us and advise you of any delays.
- > Provide a private interview room if needed.
- > Protect any personal information you give us, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the Data Protection Act 2018 and all other applicable data protection laws. You can find a copy of our privacy notice for consular services on www.gov.uk/fco/consular-services-privacy-notice
- > Use your feedback, comments and complaints to help us improve our services

We will aim to:

- > Offer a fast response and consistent advice to your first-time telephone enquiries, worldwide and around the clock, with priority calls escalated for action.
- > Assess your needs promptly and provide effective assistance based on your individual circumstances and local conditions, making every effort to contact vulnerable customers* within 24 hours of being notified of your situation
- > Provide a rapid and high-quality response, with specially trained staff, if you are caught up in a crisis overseas, with consistent and regularly updated advice and assistance as the situation develops.
- > Meet our published targets for fee-bearing services, including issuing emergency travel documents which will normally be ready in two working days (in straightforward cases, once we receive your full and complete application online, or at our Embassy, High Commission or Consulate).
- > Provide up-to-date and objective travel advice, offering a real-time response to your enquiries via social media (on weekdays from 9am-6pm and out-of-hours for urgent enquiries).

What we ask of you:

- > Treat our staff with respect. If your behaviour is 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.
- > Provide us with feedback so that we can improve our services (please see 'Tell us what you think' at the end of this document).

* We consider that someone is vulnerable when they cannot protect themselves from significant physical or emotional harm, or be protected by others. We will almost always treat many types of consular case (e.g. victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault and forced marriage, and cases involving children and young people) as vulnerable. In others, it will depend on the circumstances.

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Summary

We expect British people to take responsibility for themselves and their safety while overseas. This guide highlights some of the main things you can do to prepare for your travel and stay safe abroad and what help we can provide if you do get into difficulty.

Staying safe overseas

- > Ensure you check our travel website on **www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice** and sign up for country specific travel advice updates. Our travel advice will help you to form your own judgements about travelling or living in a particular country, and alert you to any new information (see page 8). Keep an eye on news reports of any problems in the area you are visiting. Follow @FCOtravel on Twitter and our Facebook page for updates from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).
 - > Choosing to go to a country against our travel advice may seriously restrict any help we can provide and may also mean that your travel insurance is not valid (see page 8).
 - > Before you travel, get comprehensive travel insurance which covers any pre-existing medical conditions you have, and all activities you plan to do – think particularly about the more adventurous activities which you would not normally undertake at home. If you do not take out adequate insurance, you will have to pay the costs of any emergency yourself, which could include an expensive medical bill or additional flights if as a result your travel plans have to change.
 - > At least 8 weeks before travel, check the latest country-specific health advice from the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) TravelHealthPro website **<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>** on travel-related risks and diseases, including vaccine recommendations. You may then wish to contact your health adviser or pharmacy for advice on other preventive measures and managing any pre-existing medical conditions while you're abroad. Guidance is also available from: NHS (Scotland)'s fitfortravel website **<https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations.aspx>** and the NHS website **<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/>**.
 - > Take any prescribed medicine with you and keep it to hand, as well as a copy of the prescription.
- Ensure you take enough medication to cover your time overseas. Check that your medication is legal in the country you are travelling to (see page 9).
- > Make sure your passport is valid and in good condition and that you have any necessary visas. Ensure you fill in the emergency contact details in your passport (see page 9).
 - > Leave copies of your passport, travel insurance policy (plus the insurer's 24-hour emergency number), ticket details, your itinerary and contact details with your family and friends before you go. Take copies of these items with you as well (see page 9).
 - > Take enough money for your trip and some backup funds, credit cards, travellers' cheques, or prepaid cash cards. Before you leave, ensure you know how to replace your credit cards and travellers' cheques if you lose them or they are stolen, and know how to contact your bank. 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 the standards of behaviour people expect in the country you are visiting so that you can follow them. Be aware of your personal security and take sensible precautions to protect yourself.
 - > If you are going abroad for a long period, you might want to grant someone the power of attorney to look after your financial affairs in the UK, while you're away. You could also consider whether you want to give someone the power to make decisions about your welfare or health care in case a situation arises where you are unable or incapable to make decisions for yourself. You can find more information at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney/overview.
- There is no legal right to consular assistance. All assistance provided is at our discretion.**

Who we can help

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

- ✓ British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK – see page 6).
- ✓ British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals' – see page 6), although this will depend on the circumstances - normally we cannot help dual nationals when they are in the country of their other nationality.
- ✓ Nationals of European Union Member States without a local embassy or consulate)¹
- ✓ Nationals of other Commonwealth countries where there is not a local embassy, but only in certain circumstances (see page 6).
- ✗ We cannot provide this support to other countries' nationals, even if they have been living legally in the UK.

How we're funded

Consular assistance provided to British nationals overseas is not funded from UK tax revenue, it is funded by a small premium included in the price of every British passport. 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 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

Our priority is to provide assistance to those British nationals overseas that need our help the most. The level and type of assistance we offer is tailored to the individual circumstances of each case. Our staff will make an assessment of your vulnerability and the needs you have, based on who you are, where you are, and your situation. We will then aim to offer assistance which helps meet your needs, such as:

- ✓ Provide advice and help if you have suffered rape and sexual or physical assault, are a victim of other crimes, are ill or in hospital.
- ✓ Provide timely, accurate, local information so that you can help yourself effectively. This might include details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors or funeral directors.
- ✓ Issue emergency travel documents.
- ✓ Provide information about transferring money through commercial providers.
- ✓ Provide details of other organisations that may be able to provide specialist support.
- ✓ Contact family or friends for you if you cannot do this yourself.

In addition we also:

- ✓ Work alongside the local authorities, travel industry, insurance companies and others to provide rapid and effective support in the aftermath of major incidents affecting a large number of British nationals.
- ✓ Provide notarial and documentary services, including 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 has the authority to decide who they allow into their country.
- ✗ Issue you with a new or replacement passport, or accept passport applications because passports are issued by Her Majesty's Passport Office in the UK.
- ✗ Pay any bills or give you money because we are not funded to do this and you would not get these bills paid for you if you were in the UK. You should take responsibility for yourself. It would be unfair for those who take out insurance to subsidise those who do not.
- ✗ Ensure your safety and security in another country because this is the responsibility of the government and authorities of that country.

Note 1:
In accordance with EU Directive 2015/637

- ✘ Give you legal advice or translate formal documents because such support is best provided by independent professionals. We do not have the funding or the expertise to provide these specialist services.
- ✘ Carry out searches for missing people because doing so is the responsibility of the local authorities. To search effectively requires 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. This is 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). Nor can we get you better treatment in hospital than the treatment that is given to local people. This is because we cannot interfere in another country's processes just as we would not accept such interference in the UK.
- ✘ Make travel arrangements for you, or find you work or accommodation, or make business arrangements on your behalf. This is because these are private arrangements which are your responsibility to make for yourself.
- ✘ Get involved (including offering advice) in private disputes over property, employment, commercial or other matters. This is because we are in no position to judge the facts and have no jurisdiction overseas to resolve such matters.

Crisis response

Major incidents that affect a large number of British nationals abroad may call for levels of response beyond those we describe on pages 25-28 of this guide. It's not easy to define absolutely what the circumstances might be, but they could be the result of natural disasters or large-scale accidents, civil unrest, terrorism or conflict.

We will work with the local authorities of the country, travel industry, employers, insurance companies and others in response to such incidents and will tailor our

information and support to each crisis and the needs of those affected. In very exceptional circumstances we will seek Ministerial authorisation to enhance the level of support we are able to provide in order to assist those caught up in such incidents and at risk of harm.

If you fail to follow our travel advice this may restrict the help we can provide to you.

Our commitment

The Consular Customer Charter at the beginning of this guide sets out our commitment to providing a high level of service to you. It also sets out what we require from you in return.

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 is murdered overseas or dies in suspicious circumstances, we will try to provide their family with information given to us by local investigating authorities 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. 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 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 Visas & Immigration). We provide the support described in this guide in 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. And, like any government department, we have a responsibility to use public funds efficiently and effectively.

Our duty of care to our staff

We have a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of our employees in the course of their employment. We will not send staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk.

We recognise that many people need our support at a time of great personal distress or anxiety. Our staff will always aim to be empathetic and professional when supporting you. Please remember that our staff cannot replace specialist advisers such as translators, counsellors or lawyers.

We expect you to treat our staff fairly and with respect. If you are physically or verbally abusive, they may refuse to help you.

If you are not happy with the support we have provided, you can make a complaint (see page 29).

Who we can help

We can help you if you are either travelling or living abroad and are a British national as described in this list.

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 can help nationals of European Union Member States without a local embassy or consulate.⁴ 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. We cannot help other nationalities, even if they live in the UK or have close connections to the UK.

What about dual nationals?

If you have some connection with another 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. Becoming a British national may not mean you lose your original nationality.

You may still have certain responsibilities with that country, such as compulsory military service.

If you are a dual British national in a third country (that is, a country of which you are not a national), we will offer you our full support. You do not need to be travelling on your British passport.

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 you are vulnerable and we have humanitarian concerns. These circumstances might include cases involving a murder or manslaughter, children, 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

You can contact us by phone 24/7 for help or advice from anywhere in the world by calling the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office) on 0207 008 1500, or your nearest British embassy, High Commission or Consulate (www.gov.uk/world/embassies).

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 work in separate buildings called Consulates General or Consulates.

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 can help British nationals (overseas) living or travelling outside China, Hong Kong and Macao

Note 4:

In accordance with EU Directive 2015/637

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 at **www.gov.uk/world/embassies**.

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

We will provide you with as much help as we can by telephone, even if we have no local office. We may direct you to another Embassy with whom we have an arrangement. 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.⁵ Likewise Commonwealth Embassies may offer you help. 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.

For further information about how to access consular assistance from other EU countries in places where the UK is not represented, visit the European Commission website at **<https://ec.europa.eu/consularprotection/>**.

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

Note 5:
In accordance with EU Directive 2015/637

Staying safe overseas

British nationals take millions of trips overseas every year and most of these pass without any kind of incident. 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 laws and customs.
- > You may face language barriers.
- > You may be more exposed to a wide variety of risks and threats, such as crime and fraud.

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 advice⁶ provides information and advice to help British nationals make informed decisions about their safety abroad (see www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice). This includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-western or anti-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 day. We will also publish information on www.facebook.com/fcotravel and www.twitter.com/FCOtravel.
- > Anyone travelling within the European Economic Area⁷ or Switzerland should get a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which entitles you to cheaper 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.uk⁸ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance> 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, natural disasters, 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

Note 6:
No foreign travel can be guaranteed as safe and you take personal responsibility for any trip you make abroad. Any decision to travel to, stay in or leave a country is for you to take on your own responsibility on the basis of the best available information from our travel advice and other sources. While every care is taken in preparing our Travel Advice, the FCO does not assume any responsibility, including legal responsibility, to those who read the travel advice and who choose to take it into account when making any decisions relating to a particular country, or to those affected by their decisions

Note 7:
The European Economic Area is made up of all members of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Note 8:
We are not responsible for the content of other organisations' websites and cannot accept any legal responsibility for any information they give you

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 ask your healthcare provider for any other medical advice. Follow this advice and be aware of possible health risks during your trip. See www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health, <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk> and www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk for more information. 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). 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 friend and take one copy with you, packed separately from your passport.
- > Whether you are travelling or living overseas, you should have the phone number of your nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate with you.
- > 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.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports or call the UK Passport Advice line 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 contacted during your time abroad.
- > Take enough money for your trip and some back-up funds, such as travellers' cheques, 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.
- > If you are going abroad for a long period, you might want to grant someone the power of attorney to look after your financial affairs in the UK, while you're away. You could also consider whether you want to give someone the power to make decisions about your welfare or health care in case a situation arises where you are unable or incapable to make decisions for yourself. You can find more information at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney
- > 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions. Unless your employer provides a healthcare plan, you should consider private healthcare plans to cover treatment in the country where you live.
- > 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.gov.uk/driving-abroad

Special considerations

Planning travel is important 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 (www.gov.uk/guidance/advice-for-women-travelling-abroad)
- > Hajj pilgrims (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/saudi-arabia/pilgrimage)
- > Backpackers and gap year travellers (www.gov.uk/guidance/gap-year-foreign-travel-advice)
- > Cruise travellers (www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance#the-right-cover-for-the-type-of-holiday-and-activities-you-plan)
- > Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender travellers (www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice)
- > Travellers with mental health needs (www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-advice-for-people-with-mental-health-issues)
- > Travellers with physical health needs (country specific health advice – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)
- > Travellers with disabilities (www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-for-disabled-people)

For additional information these travellers may want to consult the relevant pages under www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad/help-for-british-nationals-travelling-overseas.

When you are there

- > Be security aware and take sensible precautions. Leave your 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 (in some countries you may need to keep your passport with you). 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.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice 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 emergency travel documents overseas for a fee (see page 15), if you repeatedly lose your passport while overseas we may need to interview you for security purposes before issuing an emergency travel document. In certain circumstances, we may need to restrict the validity of a travel document and in others we may refuse to issue one once we have considered your application. 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 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 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 may be 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 dispose 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 about bringing back meat, animal products or plants from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs) or call them on 03459 335577 (+44 (0) 207 238 6951 from outside the UK). You can get information about banned and restricted goods, and your customs allowances, from HM Revenue & Customs (see www.hmrc.gov.uk 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 9). You should, for example, drink plenty of safe drinking water, use sunscreen, and take care what you eat and where you eat it.
- > Think about what a deterioration in your health overseas would mean. Are the services in the country you are visiting worse, better or the same as the UK?
- > Our lists of local lawyers⁹, translators/interpreters, doctors and funeral directors are available on British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate pages on gov.uk. We aim to check the accuracy of these lists at least once a year.

Note 9:

The information contained in these lists is provided for general information purposes only. It is not intended to, and does not, constitute a recommendation or advice, including as to the professional ability or character of any individual, firm or company, and nothing in it should be taken as so doing. The FCO accepts no liability or duty of care in respect of any information contained in these lists.

If you are going to live abroad

Going to live abroad is a major decision and you should research in advance 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 consular 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.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and the website of the embassy in the UK of the country concerned.
- > 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 the 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. Depending on the local situation, you may have to make private arrangements for medical and/or dental treatment.
- > 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions). Tell 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 you 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions 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. You could also consider if you want to give someone the power to make decisions about your welfare or health care in case situation arises where you are unable or incapable to make decisions for yourself. You can find more information at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney/overview.
- > 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 English-speaking lawyer who is licensed to practice and is experienced in property sales and avoid using anyone recommended by the agent, vendor or developer. We cannot give you legal advice or get involved in purchases or disputes. A list of English-speaking lawyers is on each British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate page on the gov.uk website. If required, you should also engage an independent translator or interpreter.
- > 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.
- > Check out the property guidance on the gov.uk website. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Association of International Property Professionals are useful contacts for people looking to buy a property overseas.

If you are retiring overseas

- > Contact associations or charities for advice. Age UK (www.ageuk.org.uk) and www.gov.uk/moving-or-retiring-abroad 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.
- > Make plans for any deterioration of your health. Find out what support you will and will not be entitled to.
- > Consider what will happen if you were to lose capacity to make certain decisions while abroad.

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.
- > More information on moving or retiring abroad can be found on www.gov.uk/moving-or-retiring-abroad.

What our Embassies can do

There is information on all our British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate pages on gov.uk 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 (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts, to receive real-time travel advice updates.

> Notarial services

If there is no specific formal requirement for a notarial service to be provided by the British Embassy/Consulate General and where local notaries can provide the service, the British Embassy/Consulate will not provide them.

Consular Officers in Commonwealth countries have no general powers to perform notarial acts, therefore our posts in Commonwealth countries are unable to provide notarial services.

For more information about notarial services and related charges please consult the Embassy and Consulate websites at www.gov.uk/world/embassies.

- > **Marriage, civil partnership, birth and death**
Although there is no legal requirement for you to obtain a consular birth or death registration, we can register the birth or death of British nationals that occur in some countries overseas. Further information including which documents you will need to produce are available online at www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-to-register-an-overseas-birth and www.gov.uk/register-a-death. Our posts may also be able to help if you are getting married or entering into a civil partnership abroad. The documents required vary country by country and the process can be complicated and time consuming. You can find further information on British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites or www.gov.uk/marriage-abroad.

Remember that you should have adequate 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.

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 25–28.

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 ask your bank or a relative to send money to you using a reliable money transfer company. Our staff can give you information about this if you need it.
- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, you should also report it immediately to Her Majesty's Passport Office at www.gov.uk/report-a-lost-or-stolen-passport.

Travelling abroad when you don't have your passport

- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, or you do not have it with you for another reason, and you urgently need to travel, we may be able to issue a replacement emergency travel document. We will only do this once we are satisfied of your identity and that you are a British national. You will need to show you are planning to travel, complete the online application www.gov.uk/emergency-travel-document/how-to-apply form and pay a fee.
- > If you have never had a passport before, in most circumstances you will not be able to apply for an emergency travel document. You will need to apply to Her Majesty's Passport Office for a full validity passport.
- > A replacement emergency 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 emergency 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 an emergency travel document out of hours. We will in most cases charge an out of hours call out fee.
- > Some countries do not accept emergency travel documents and others (including the USA), may require you to apply for a visa to go in your emergency travel document. Where we can we will advise you of any known restrictions but our advice www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice does not guarantee your admission. If you are unsure about the entry requirements for countries you plan to visit or pass through you should check with the relevant Embassy or High Commission and/or the immigration authorities of the country concerned.
- > 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 travel ticket to get you home. If we transfer money on your behalf, we will charge you for this.
- > We cannot provide money to family or friends to help with their travel or accommodation if they visit you, for example if you have had to go into hospital.
- > We are not funded to provide financial assistance and we cannot pay your bills. It is important that you have adequate travel insurance – if you don't, you will be liable for any costs you are charged.

- > We may be able to provide an emergency loan from public funds to help you return home, but this is discretionary and will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances, and only if you have exhausted all other methods of getting funds. If you are eligible, you will have to sign an 'undertaking to repay' agreement, where you agree to repay the loan. In most cases, you will have to secure this loan by giving up your passport to our staff, who will then issue you with an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to your country of residence. The cost of this document will be added to the loan. We will not return your passport to you, and Her Majesty's Passport Office 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 home does not mean that we will automatically agree to it.

Victims of crime overseas

- > We can give general information about local police and legal procedures. We cannot give you legal advice, but we can suggest 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 be able to help www.victimsupport.org.uk/.
 - > 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/criminal-injuries-compensation-authority or call 0300 003 3601).
 - > We have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad', which offers more detailed information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-of-crime.

Victims of rape or sexual assault overseas

- > We take any report of rape and 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.
- > Many victims of rape and sexual assault, regardless of their gender, 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, and one is available. 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, including rape crisis organisations. We can consider asking for the services of a sexual offences trained officer from your local police station to advise and help you. Or we can put you in touch with Rape Crisis Glasgow & Clyde for support and advice if there is no local rape support organisation (www.glasgowclyderapecrisis.org.uk/content/survivors-abroad).
- > We have a leaflet called 'Rape and sexual assault overseas' with more information. You will find details at www.gov.uk/government/publications/rape-and-sexual-assault-abroad-returning-to-the-uk.

Victims of Torture and Mistreatment

- > We take all allegations or concerns of torture and mistreatment very seriously and will follow up with action appropriate to the circumstances of the case.
- > We will do our best to ensure that you are safe. If detained or in hospital this could include increasing the frequency of our visits to you, assisting you gain access to medical treatment, and considering support for a transfer if you wish to move to another wing or facility.
- > Although we cannot investigate torture or mistreatment allegations, with your permission we can raise them with the local authorities, demanding an end to the mistreatment, and that the incident is investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.
- > If you do not want to raise the allegations right away, we can still help you do so at a later date e.g. after you have returned to the UK.
- > When considering how to act, we will always put your wishes first and avoid any action that might

put you or any other person that may be affected at risk.

British nationals who go into hospital overseas

- > We aim to contact you as soon as possible after being told that you have been admitted to hospital to assess how we can help you. We will then aim to provide assistance according to your individual needs. This may include visiting you if you are vulnerable.
- > When we assess your vulnerability, 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 we should visit you. If we believe we should, and there is a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the same city as the hospital you are in, we will aim to visit you as soon as possible.
- > 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 in certain situations if they do not speak English. There are occasions when travel insurance becomes invalid – for instance, if a pre-existing condition is not declared. In these cases, you or your family must pay for any treatment.
- > We do not usually contact or visit people who have travelled specifically for medical treatment.
- > If you are travelling within the European Economic Area¹⁰ or Switzerland, you should carry a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which lets you get state healthcare in those countries at a reduced cost or sometimes for free. If you normally live in the UK, you can apply for the EHIC at any

Note 10:

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

point, even after medical treatment has become necessary or started (see www.ehic.org.uk). Remember that an EHIC does not replace travel insurance.

- > We cannot pay medical bills.

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.
- > If you plan to return to the UK we can offer information to help you make an informed decision about this.
- > We have a leaflet called ‘Mental Health: Travelling Abroad’ with more information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health.

Forced marriage of a British national abroad

- > In a forced marriage a person is coerced into marrying someone against his or her will. They 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 fmu@fco.gov.uk or by phone on 020 7008 0151 from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Outside office hours, if your query is urgent, you can obtain advice by phoning our switchboard on 020 7008 1500. It is essential that you think carefully before deciding whether to travel to the country concerned. For more information see www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage.
- > 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, and there is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates at www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations. If you cannot get there, depending on your location, we may still be able to 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.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage.

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 as soon as possible after being told about your arrest or detention so that we can assess how we can help you but how soon this is may depend on local procedures. We will then aim to provide assistance according to your individual circumstances and local conditions.
- > 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
- > 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 will keep them updated on your well-being, with your consent.
- > If the prison has no postal service, we can deliver letters from your family and friends to the prison, but we cannot deliver letters directly to you or pass letters from you to them unless the prison permits it.
- > 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. You will want to consider the benefits of local legal representation and to discuss all the costs beforehand with the legal representative. In no circumstances can we pay your legal or interpretation costs.
- > 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.
- > We cannot get you out of prison or detention, nor can we get special treatment for you because you are British. If however you are not treated in line with internationally-accepted standards we will consider approaching local authorities. This may include if your trial does not follow internationally-recognised standards for a fair trial or is unreasonably delayed compared to local cases.
- > With your permission, we can consider taking up a 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.
- > Consular staff will keep in regular contact with you, either by visiting personally or by telephone/letter. The frequency of visits will depend on local prison conditions and your personal circumstances.
- > 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 children and young people 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 Death Penalty Project (www.deathpenaltyproject.org) who provide free legal assistance and advice to British nationals facing the death penalty, and Reprive (www.reprive.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 'In Prison Abroad' www.gov.uk/government/publications/in-prison-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 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 authorities¹¹.

You can find more information about what to do if you are arrested abroad at www.gov.uk/help-if-you-are-arrested-abroad. There are also leaflets on being in prison abroad and transfers at www.gov.uk/government/publications/arrest-or-detention.

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.

Moving to the UK after living abroad

- > 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 entitled automatically to state benefits, a state retirement pension, free NHS hospital treatment or assistance with higher education fees.
- > The Gov.uk website has information on benefits and services, employment, tax and education, and you can get free, independent advice from the Citizens Advice Bureaux (www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

Note 11:

We keep and use information in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the Data Protection Act 2018, and all other applicable data protection laws. We may release information to other UK government departments and public authorities in accordance with relevant exemptions. You can find a copy of our privacy notice for consular services on www.gov.uk/fco/consular-services-privacy-notice

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 25–28).

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 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.
- > We will do everything we can to make sure that, as next of kin, you do not hear 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 your wishes about dealing with the body to our staff overseas. 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 your 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.
 - > 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 if we are able to contact you.

- > All deaths must be registered with the local authorities 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 with the Embassy, High Commission or Consulate the death of a British national that occurs overseas. But you will need to obtain a local death certificate which can be used in the UK for most purposes including probate. If you want to apply for a Consular death registration you should check our services online at www.gov.uk/register-a-death. Note that we are not able to register the deaths of British citizens in certain countries.
- > 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.
- > You can find further information at www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-death-abroad.
- > 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 can provide general advice about the Coronial process.
- > We can provide lists of local lawyers, interpreters, translators and local and international funeral directors and, where available, details of local support groups. Travel insurance often covers costs associated with a death overseas. But we cannot pay for any of these services.
- > We can refer you to Victim Support Homicide Service in England and Wales or Victim Support Scotland, if you wish.
- > We can give you practical information on arranging repatriation, registering the death and obtaining a local death certificate.
- > We can seek updates on your behalf on the investigation or trial, if the local authorities or your lawyer are not able to do so.
- > We can offer general information about the local police system and legal system, including any legal aid that is available. But we cannot provide legal advice. In all cases where you have concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death, we suggest you get professional legal advice.
- > We can accompany you to the first and last day of a trial and at the verdict.
- > We can provide advice on handling media attention.
- > We cannot investigate crimes, including murder or manslaughter abroad. Investigations are the responsibility of the police in the country where the person died.
- > We cannot interfere in another country's investigation or judicial processes. 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

Death of a British national abroad in suspicious circumstances

The death of a relative or friend is always distressing. It can be even harder if the death happens abroad and if the death is being investigated as murder or manslaughter.

- > We can provide you with assistance by assigning a dedicated consular officer who is familiar with such cases. They can meet family representatives at our offices in London, contact you at regular intervals, request updates on your behalf and try to answer any questions you may have.
- > We can support you if you decide to visit the country where the death occurred, for example helping to arrange (and sometimes attending with you) an initial round of meetings with the authorities.

bereaved, ensuring that we do not interfere in the investigation or judicial processes in that country.

- > We cannot force foreign police or courts to give us information on investigations or court cases.
- > 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. You can find further information on our services and others that may be able to help those bereaved through murder or manslaughter at www.gov.uk/government/publications/helping-british-people-abroad-murder-and-manslaughter

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.
- > If the prison has no postal service, we can deliver letters from you to the prison, but we cannot deliver letters directly to a prisoner, or pass letters from them to you, unless the prison permits it.
- > 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.

British nationals missing abroad

- > 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 to 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.
- > 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 Lucie Blackman Trust – www.lbtrust.org (which used to be called Missing Abroad) who may offer further advice and help.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Missing persons abroad' which you may find helpful. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-persons.

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, who will normally 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 arrange a medical check-up and travel to the UK.

If your child is taken abroad by their other parent without your permission

- > If you are worried about your child being abducted overseas by their other parent or a relative, you should contact the Foreign Commonwealth Office on 020 7008 1500. If you are overseas you should contact the local British Embassy or High Commission. You can find details about how to contact the Embassy or High Commission at www.gov.uk/world/embassies. If your child has been abducted, we can tell you whether the country which your child has been taken to is operating the 1980 Hague Convention on International Parental Child Abduction. This is a multilateral treaty which includes a process for returning children under 16 who have been abducted overseas by a parent (although this outcome is not always guaranteed). The UK is party to the Convention, as are many other countries. If the country your child is in is a signatory, we can put you in touch with the central authorities in the UK so that you can submit relevant Hague applications.
 - > If the country to which your child has been taken is not operating 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 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 they have contacted the police overseas to assist in finding the child.
 - > If your child is found, and if the other parent agrees, we may be able to arrange a consular visit to your child.
 - > 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 you have reported them 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 Reunite International Child Abduction Centre 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 at www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-parental-child-abduction.

Staying safe in a crisis overseas – what you can do and how we can help

This section outlines what we can do during a crisis, including what you can expect from us and what we ask of you.

In some circumstances, there may be limits to the assistance we can provide in a crisis – please take sensible precautions, read and follow our travel advice and take responsibility for your own safety first. This applies particularly if you are travelling to or living in a location where there is a high risk from 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?

A crisis is a significant, inherently uncertain event with the potential to inflict serious damage on the interests of individuals, communities, organisations and institutions. Providing an effective and swift response to crises overseas, and providing tailored assistance to British nationals caught up in them, is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office priority.

There are three broad types of incident for which we may activate a crisis response:

- > A major incident in which large numbers of British nationals may have been killed or injured, or which continues to pose a danger. This could include 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 take particular precautions or, in extreme circumstances, to leave the country.
- > Events which – whilst not generally threatening lives – cause disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals. This may include incidents such as a volcanic eruption resulting in severe travel disruption or major airport shutdowns.

Who we can help in a crisis

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

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK – but see page 6)
- > British nationals with another nationality – ‘dual nationals’
- > Nationals of European Union Member States without a local embassy or consulate¹³
- > In certain circumstances, family members of British nationals (spouse/partner and dependent children aged 18 years and under only – we cannot assist other family members)
- > In certain situations, other eligible persons including Commonwealth nationals who do not have an Embassy of their own to get help from
- > We cannot help other nationalities, even if they live in the UK or have close connections to the UK.

We will focus our support on those who need it most, starting with the most vulnerable and particularly those at risk of harm.

Note 13:
In accordance with EU Directive 2015/637

What you can do to prepare for a crisis overseas

Before you go

- > Read our advice about the precautions you should take in case of a crisis overseas at www.gov.uk/how-to-deal-with-a-crisis-overseas.
- > 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.
- > Subscribe to our travel advice email alerts for countries you are travelling to so you know when our advice is updated at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. You can also follow our travel advice on social media (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and (www.twitter.com/fcotravel).
- > Subscribe to the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or FCO Facebook www.facebook.com/fcotravel/ and Twitter (www.twitter.com/FCOtravel) accounts.
- > Take out adequate travel insurance. If you are going to work or live abroad, you should assess and consider the risks against any personal or corporate insurance policies. Travel insurance companies sometimes refer to our travel advice in their policies. Your policy may not provide cover if you travel to a country where the FCO advise against all, or all but essential travel.
- > Read our advice on reducing your risk from terrorism abroad (www.gov.uk/guidance/reduce-your-risk-from-terrorism-while-abroad) and what to do in the event of a terrorist attack
- > 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).

When you are there:

- > If you are caught up in or near a crisis overseas, please remember to contact your family and friends to let them know you are safe or if you require assistance, as soon as you are able and it is safe to do so.

- > Keep your passport, and those of immediate family members, up to date, along with any visas that you may require; a replacement emergency travel document may take time to issue, which could make travelling more complicated.
- > Consider preparing supplies of useful items, or items more difficult to secure in an emergency, for example sufficient medical supplies (first aid kit, specific prescription medication that you or family members require), a torch, batteries, fuel and access to several days' supply of food and water.
- > If you are working overseas, familiarise yourself with your employer's evacuation and contingency plans, particularly in high-risk locations. Make sure your employer has your next of kin details in case of an emergency.
- > Follow the guidance given in our travel advice. During an unfolding crisis this will be updated frequently. You should use our travel advice to help make a decision about whether to remain in, or leave, a country or area. If you don't follow our travel advice, this may impact on our ability to provide support at a later stage.
- > Please take sensible precautions, read and follow our travel advice, use it to inform your travel plans and take responsibility for your own safety first. This applies particularly if you are travelling to or living in a location where there is a high risk of terrorism, unrest or natural disasters. In some circumstances, where we have advised against all travel to the affected area, we may not be able to provide you with any assistance.

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

Due to the exceptional nature of crises, it is impossible to predict every eventuality or the assistance you might need. The information in this section is not exhaustive but rather, is an outline of the principles we follow when assisting British nationals and other eligible people in a crisis.

We can be contacted by telephone 24/7 by calling the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London or a British embassy or consulate overseas. Our operators provide information and advice about the help available during a crisis.

Wherever you are, the host government has responsibility for the safety of its citizens and overseas visitors or residents during a crisis situation.

In some circumstances, there may be limits to the assistance we can provide, even in a crisis. It may also take some time to locate or contact you if infrastructure has been damaged (for example if telephone lines are down, bridges have collapsed or access to roads has been blocked). Physical access may also be impossible if the local authorities have sealed off the area where you are.

We have a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of our employees in the course of their employment. We will not send our staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk. In extreme circumstances 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.

In a crisis, we may:

- > Work with local authorities – including hospitals and police – to establish the facts of the incident and if British nationals have been affected. This is our first priority in any crisis, but it can take time to ensure our information is accurate, to avoid causing unnecessary distress for families.
- > Work with the local authorities to provide you with clear information about their response to incidents and signpost you to relevant sources of assistance. In some circumstances, we may work with airlines, airports and travel companies and highlight their advice and services too.
- > Provide information via local radio, community notice boards, warden networks or a desk at an airport because mobile phones and the internet can go down during a crisis.
- > Deploy staff to support you and reinforce our Embassy if required. Alongside FCO consular experts in large scale incidents these teams can include specialists from the British Red Cross and the UK Police Disaster Victim Identification teams.
- > Open up our dedicated hotline, SMS and online web form facilities for people to contact us about British nationals that require assistance in a crisis. Please be aware that in order to provide effective support we may share this data with other

organisations such as the travel industry or local authorities.

- > Support the families of any British nationals killed or seriously injured in an incident, for example in providing information to support the making of arrangements for repatriation or medical evacuations to the UK.
- > Provide you with local information or support you if you are a relative of a victim coming out to the scene, exceptionally this may include meeting you at the airport, arranging and attending meetings with local authorities.
- > In exceptional circumstances, organise an assisted departure where we help you to access transport or provide additional transport to supplement existing options, so that you can leave a country or location.
- > 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 left earlier would 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.
- > In the event of an evacuation, provide transport to a place of safety. Please note that this is usually to a safe third country and not to the UK.
- > Work closely with other countries to make best use of charter flights and military transport where appropriate.

Terrorist attacks

Terrorist attacks are exceptional because the individuals involved are random victims of attacks directed at society as a whole. In order to take account of this we have put in place Exceptional Assistance Measures for the victims of terrorist attacks abroad, and their families. See www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptional-assistance-measures-for-british-victims-of-terrorist-incidents-abroad for more 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 assistance if you have travelled against our travel advice.

Support after a crisis

- > We provide tailored information and support to British nationals affected by large scale incidents abroad. But we know that 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 and Gatwick Travel Cares, and Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow Chaplaincies), to look after victims' immediate needs on arrival in the UK.
- > We aim to provide victims with as much relevant information as possible on potential sources of ongoing emotional and practical support. Details of relevant organisations can be found at **www.gov.uk/guidance/support-if-youre-affected-by-a-crisis-abroad**.
- > We also work with other government departments and external organisations as part of the government's Victims of Terrorism Unit to ensure longer term support and assistance options for victims, survivors, witnesses and all those affected by terrorist attacks, are effective and coordinated. See **<https://victimsofterrorism.campaign.gov.uk>**.

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 for details of how to provide feedback including through surveys (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/complaints-procedure). Alternatively, you can email feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk with your comments.

Official complaints procedure

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to providing a high quality service and to helping you resolve your complaint as quickly as possible. In order to do this we need you to tell us when we get things wrong.

Details of the complaints procedure are outlined below. Alternatively you can visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/complaints-procedure for details.

There are two stages to our complaints procedure.

Stage 1. If you are not satisfied with the service we provided and want to make an official complaint, please send details either by email to feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk, or in writing to:

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

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

Stage 2. If you are not happy with our initial response then please write to the Director of Consular Services at:

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

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

The Director will see all complaints and 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.

Next steps

If you are not satisfied with the response from the Consular Director, then you can escalate your complaint by asking your Member of Parliament (MP) to refer your case to the Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman makes final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved by the NHS and government departments, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Their service is free for everyone. More information about their processes can be found on their website www.ombudsman.org.uk or by calling 0345 015 4033.

If you have exhausted the complaints process and continue to write to us about your case, we may let you know that we do not intend to respond to your emails, phone calls or letters unless they contain new information.

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.



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