



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



Department  
for Transport

**From the Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs and the  
Secretary of State for Transport**

Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London, SW1A 2AH

Department for Transport  
Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Rd  
London SW1P 4DR

27 March 2020

**GETTING BRITISH NATIONALS HOME: GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED RETURNS  
BY AIR**

The Government is working intensively with its international partners to keep air routes and critical transit hubs open to enable British travellers to return to the UK by commercial means wherever possible. This should always be their first resort.

We acknowledge that this is a challenging time for airlines both operationally and financially. The Government will continue to work non-stop around the world to keep routes open. At the same time, we recognise that thousands of travellers have been affected by flight cancellations and need to find alternative routes or change their tickets. It is essential that airlines meet this need and offer their passengers the service they deserve, including alternatives where routes are cancelled to allow them to change tickets – including between carriers – as quickly and cheaply as possible.

The situation is evolving constantly. Closures of airspace and travel restrictions now mean that for many British travellers there is no longer a commercial option. In view of these unprecedented challenges, we welcome your agreement to work in partnership with the Government to help stranded British travellers get back home to the UK.

This will be a joint effort in the national interest. The Government will lead the charge with airlines as our commercial partner. To facilitate this, we have agreed that the Government will commission a series of special charter flights that you will operate on a strict cost recovery basis paid by the taxpayer. These flights will be booked and ticketed centrally, through a Government-procured travel management company. All the fares will be at an affordable level determined by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Those genuinely unable to pay will be offered an emergency loan by the FCO if they have exhausted all other avenues.

The FCO will lead this programme of special flights. The Department for Transport (DfT) and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will continue to provide senior strategic engagement alongside operational support. DfT and CAA personnel will be embedded within a central planning and delivery unit led by the FCO that will work

through the FCO's overseas network in priority countries to secure agreement for special flights.

We have agreed to focus our efforts on helping British travellers overseas and their direct family members get home to the UK, not British overseas residents.

We will prioritise the places where commercial routes no longer exist and where large numbers of British travellers are stranded. We will continue to focus on those who are vulnerable due to age or underlying medical conditions, taking local healthcare and security situations into consideration. It is important that we assess how people can move within a country in order to assemble for special return flights, and whether aircraft can safely access a location.

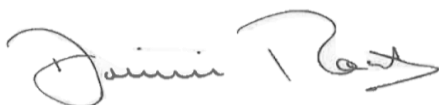
Flights and passengers will be transported in line with Public Health England advice. These special flights are not intended for symptomatic passengers. Those unable to travel should follow our advice to self-isolate, and the medical and other advice of the local authorities. We will continue to provide them with all the consular support we can.

FCO Travel Advice will be our primary public communications channel. We will update it regularly to provide stranded Britons with the latest information about new departure options. We will also advertise our special flights in-country.

This situation is unprecedented, and our priorities and departure options are liable to change. We may need to withdraw flights if an aircraft is unable to access a location safely, or if demand for repatriation from that location is low. We will establish a clear operational flight programme and commercial contracting mechanisms jointly with you. We kindly ask you to be flexible, and ready to have flights available at short notice.

The Coronavirus crisis is a challenge unlike any we have faced in generations. By working together, we send a strong message of reassurance to Britons stranded overseas. We will do our best to bring people home, and help reunite families and loved ones.

*Yours ever,*



**The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP**

**Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs**



**The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP**

**Secretary of State for Transport**