

Support for British nationals abroad: A guide



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Contents

Foreword	2
Summary	4
Who we can help	7
Staying safe overseas	9
If something happens to you	15
If something happens to a relative or partner	20
If you are affected by a terrorist attack or a major catastrophe	24
Providing the best support we can	26
Appendix	28

Foreword

Helping British nationals in difficulty overseas is a vital part of the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). With 12 million British nationals living overseas and 60 million trips made abroad each year, we are continually working to develop and improve the support we provide.

As part of this, we are increasingly focusing on helping people prepare before they travel. Being well informed and well prepared is the first step towards enjoying a safe and relaxing trip, which is why we are delighted that around nine million people now read the travel advice pages of our website every year. We are also raising awareness through our 'Know Before You Go' campaigns, run with travel industry partners. This guide will give you general advice on preparing to travel overseas.

But while preparation is key, it is of course not always possible to predict or prevent every eventuality. So if you do get into difficulty, you need to know where to contact us and how we can help. This guide gives you that vital information.

FCO staff work 24 hours a day, all year round to provide high-quality help to the British public around the world. Last year they helped almost 35,000 people in serious distress, including 4,000 people in hospital because of an injury or illness. They also have daily experience of dealing with more common problems such as lost passports.

We are committed to improving the quality of our service, and would welcome feedback on your experience of the support you receive.

We wish you travels that are both safe and enjoyable.



David Miliband

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs



Gillian Merron

Minister for Consular Policy

Website: www.fco.gov.uk/travel

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

Our publications include:

Checklist for travellers

Death overseas

Disabled travellers

Going to live abroad

Guide for bereaved families

In prison abroad

International parental child abduction

Child abduction and the UK-Pakistan protocol

Missing persons abroad

Rape and sexual assault overseas

Transfers home for prisoners abroad

Victims of crime abroad

Summary

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

Staying safe overseas

- > Check our travel website on www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call 0845 850 2829. Keep an eye on news reports of any problems in the area you are visiting. (See page 9.)
- > Get full travel insurance or an overseas health plan. If you do not take out proper insurance, you will normally have to pay the costs of any emergency yourself, including expensive medical bills. If you choose to go to a country against our travel advice, this may seriously restrict any help we can provide and may also mean that your travel insurance is not valid. (See page 9.)
- > At least six weeks before you go, check with your doctor what vaccinations and other health precautions you may need to take for your trip. Take any prescribed medicine with you and keep it to hand, as well as a copy of the prescription. (See page 10.)
- > Make sure your passport is valid and in good condition, and that you have any necessary visas. Fill in the emergency contact details in your passport. (See page 10.)
- > Use our online registration service to register details of your and your family's travel plans. Visit www.fco.gov.uk and click on 'LOCATE' to sign up. (See page 10.)
- > Leave copies of your passport, insurance policy (plus the insurer's 24-hour emergency number), ticket details, your itinerary and contact details with your family and friends. (See page 10.)
- > Take enough money for your trip and some back-up funds, such as traveller's cheques (in sterling or US dollars) or credit cards. Before you leave, find out how you can replace your traveller's cheques and credit cards if you lose them, and keep a separate note of their numbers. (See page 11.)

- > Before you go, get a good guidebook and get to know your destination. Find out about local laws and customs, and follow them. Be aware of your personal security and take sensible precautions to protect yourself. (See page 11.)

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 7)
- > British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals' – see page 7), although this will depend on the circumstances (see page 7)
- > European Union nationals or, in certain circumstances, Commonwealth nationals whose country does not have a local mission. (See page 7.)

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

What kind of help we can provide

We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, including:

- > issuing replacement passports
- > providing information about transferring funds
- > providing appropriate help if you have suffered rape or serious assault, are a victim of other crime, are ill or in hospital
- > providing details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors

- > doing all we properly can to contact you within 24 hours of being told that you have been detained
- > offering support and help in a range of other cases, such as child abductions, death of relatives overseas, missing people and kidnapping
- > contacting family or friends for you if you want
- > making special arrangements in cases of terrorism, civil unrest or natural disasters.

We cannot:

- > get involved in private disputes over property, employment, commercial or other matters
- > get you out of prison, prevent the local authorities from deporting you after your prison sentence, or interfere in criminal or civil court proceedings
- > help you enter a country, for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid, as we cannot interfere in another country's immigration policy or procedures
- > give you legal advice, investigate crimes or carry out searches for missing people, although we can give you details of people who may be able to help you in these cases, such as English-speaking lawyers
- > get you better treatment in hospital than the treatment that is given to local people
- > get you better treatment in prison than local prisoners, although we may raise concerns with local authorities if treatment falls below internationally recognised standards
- > pay any bills or give you money from public funds
- > make travel arrangements for you, or find you work or accommodation
- > make business arrangements on your behalf
- > make sure you will be safe in another country – safety and security are matters for the government concerned
- > provide compensation if you are affected by a major catastrophe or terrorist attack.

Major catastrophes

Some major catastrophes involving British nationals abroad may need exceptional levels of response beyond what is described in this guide, as set out on pages 24 and 25. It is not easy to define every possible circumstance, but these events may be the result of natural disasters or large-scale accidents, or of terrorism or conflict. No one set of responses will meet all circumstances.

If the Foreign Secretary considers an event to be a major catastrophe affecting significant numbers of people we can help, we will:

- > consider very early on whether exceptional help should be provided from public funds
- > set up an emergency centre for the public to report their concerns about friends and family by phone or through an online form on our website (www.fco.gov.uk)
- > provide information if we have it, and if we believe it to be reliable, to people who have been affected and their family members who we are in contact with
- > consider sending appropriate extra staff to the country involved.

Our values

We set high standards for the support we can provide. When we offer you support, we will:

- > be polite, helpful and professional
- > answer consular enquiries either in person, by letter or over the phone, as efficiently and quickly as we can
- > explain clearly from the start what help we can give and when you may need to get help from others
- > make sure suitable arrangements are in place for answering genuine emergency calls outside opening hours, both in London and overseas

- > keep your personal information confidential (see note 1 below)
- > make sure everyone has access to our help, no matter what their sex, race, age, colour, sexuality, disability or religion
- > learn lessons if things go wrong or as a result of useful feedback
- > deal with complaints fully and fairly.

You should:

- > treat our staff with respect (if you are physically or verbally abusive, we may refuse to continue to help you)
- > have full travel insurance, or healthcare and any other appropriate cover if you live or travel abroad
- > have made preparations before travelling – for example, packing medicine (see page 10), having any necessary vaccinations, and leaving details of your itinerary with family or friends
- > have researched your destination, including checking our travel website (www.fco.gov.uk/travel)
- > follow local laws
- > take local advice about what is safe or unsafe, and follow this advice
- > avoid unnecessary risks and take care of your travel documents and money
- > be prepared to pay for some types of consular support – for example, issuing an emergency travel document (we do not make a profit from these charges, which we make only to cover the costs of providing consular services).

Note 1:

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

When our job is over

We offer support to distressed British nationals abroad, and to their families either in the UK or elsewhere, to deal with the **immediate effects of the case**. In certain exceptional cases, our officers may be involved in a particular case for a longer period of time. For example, if a British national dies in suspicious circumstances, we will give the family all the information we can which the local investigating authorities provide about any developments in the case. But sometimes, people need long-term support in areas where our staff are not trained professionals, such as support from bereavement counsellors or investigative officers. Although we cannot provide this or similar long-term help ourselves, we can suggest where you can go for guidance. This may mean going to another UK government department, such as the Humanitarian Assistance Unit in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (see page 25). Or, it may mean getting in touch with a non-governmental organisation or charity.

Important notes

This document sets out the help which we aim to provide to British nationals who are in difficulty overseas. **It does not cover the other work our staff do, such as statutory services (registering deaths and births) or issuing UK passports overseas. There is more information about these services on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.**

We provide the support described in this guide in almost 200 countries across the world, in different and sometimes difficult conditions. Local factors such as security, the law, transport, medical facilities and relations with the local authorities, as well as the circumstances of each individual case and the resources available, may all affect the help we can provide.

Equally there may be some occasions – for example, a natural catastrophe – where we cannot provide the usual kinds of help. And, like any government department, we have a responsibility to use public funds efficiently and effectively.

If you are not happy with the support we have provided, you can make a complaint (see page 27).

Who we can help

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

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

- > A British citizen
- > A British Overseas Territories citizen (see note 1 below)
- > A British overseas citizen
- > A British national (overseas) (see note 2 below)
- > A British subject
- > A British protected person

See the appendix for definitions of all these categories.

We cannot help non-British nationals, no matter how long they have lived in the UK and what their connections are to the UK. The only exception to this rule is where a specific agreement exists with another state – for example, the agreement between European Union member states to help those EU nationals without a local Embassy or Consulate. We may also help Commonwealth nationals in non-Commonwealth countries where they do not have any diplomatic or consular representation, depending on the circumstances of the case.

What about dual nationals?

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

Note 1:

Because the British Overseas Territories are 'Crown possessions' under British sovereignty, British nationals should contact the local authorities if they are in difficulty in these Territories. 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.

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

If you are a dual national travelling on your British passport in a third state (that is, a country of which you are not a national), we will offer you our full support. If you are travelling on the passport of your other nationality, we will normally direct you to that state's local Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. So, for example, if you are a dual US-British national travelling in France and you used your US passport when you entered France, we would normally direct you to the nearest US Embassy or Consulate for help. We may make an exception to this rule if, having looked at the circumstances of the case, we consider that there is a special humanitarian reason to do so.

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

Note 2:

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 if they are held in mainland China. However, we provide the same help to all British nationals (overseas) living or travelling outside China, Hong Kong and Macao as we do to any other British national in difficulty.

Where you can find us

Support is provided by **British diplomatic or consular missions overseas** and by the Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

British diplomatic missions overseas are the British Government's main offices in other countries, usually in capital cities. These missions take the form of British High Commissions or Deputy High Commissions in Commonwealth countries and British Embassies in other countries. British consular staff work in these offices or sometimes in separate buildings known as Consulates General or Consulates in capital cities or regional centres. In some places where there are no British diplomatic or consular missions, we have networks of Honorary Consuls who can offer some limited help or put you in touch with the nearest British mission. **For the rest of this document, we have used 'British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate' to mean all British missions overseas.**

If you need help in a country where there is no British diplomatic or consular mission, you can receive help from the diplomatic or consular mission of another member of the European Union. 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.

There is a directory of British overseas missions on our website at **www.fco.gov.uk**.

Our duty of care to our staff

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

Many people need our support at a time of great personal distress or anxiety. Our staff will always try to be sensitive and as helpful as possible. Please remember that staff may be dealing with a number of difficult cases at any one time. Please also remember that our staff cannot replace specialist advisers such as counsellors or lawyers.

Please treat our staff fairly and with respect. If you are physically or verbally abusive, our staff have the right to refuse to continue to help you.

Staying safe overseas

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

- > you are less likely to be familiar with local laws, conditions and risks
- > you may be more exposed to a variety of threats, such as crime and scams
- > support which you could freely get in the UK may not be available or may be very expensive.

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

Before you go

- > **We provide information** to help British nationals make informed decisions about their safety abroad (see www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call 0845 850 2829). This includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-British demonstrations, lawlessness, violence, natural disasters, epidemics, and aircraft and shipping safety. We review the information on our travel website for every country every month and following any significant incident. We will revise it and reissue it once every three months at the very least. In a developing crisis we update the information much more regularly and, if necessary, several times a day (see note 1 below). Our travel website also contains important general information on safety abroad, under the heading 'Staying safe and healthy abroad'. You should also keep an eye on the news for reports of any problems in places that you plan to visit.

- > Always make sure that you **have full travel insurance**. Anyone travelling within the European Economic Area (see note 2 overleaf) or Switzerland should also get a **free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)** which entitles you to some reduced or free emergency care. However, you will still need travel insurance. You can apply for an EHIC at post offices, by phone on 0845 606 2030, or online at www.ehic.org.uk or www.dh.gov.uk/travellers. If you are going to live abroad, find out whether the UK has a social security agreement with the country where you plan to live and what services are covered. For more information, check the Department for Work and Pensions' website (www.dwp.gov.uk). Unless your employer provides a healthcare plan, you should consider private healthcare plans to cover treatment in the country where you live. You cannot expect public funds to be used to pay for people who have not taken out insurance, whether going on holiday or going to live overseas, and you should remember that the costs of, for example, a medical emergency abroad can be very expensive. See www.fco.gov.uk/travel for more information about travel insurance.

Note 1:

The purpose of our travel advice is to provide information and views to help British nationals form their own judgements about travelling to or working in a particular country. While we take every care when preparing our travel advice, we cannot accept any responsibility, including legal responsibility, if you read the

travel advice and choose to take it into account when making any decisions relating to a particular country. Neither the UK Government nor any member of British consular or diplomatic staff abroad can accept legal responsibility for any injury, loss or damage caused as a result of anything set out in our travel advice.

- > Make sure that your **insurance is up to date and valid for the entire trip and that it covers everything and everyone** who is travelling. Check exactly what is covered – for example, personal injury as a result of terrorist activity, cover for all the activities you want to do (including any dangerous sports), all your luggage and equipment, and legal costs. You should also look carefully at **exemptions** to the insurance policy (some policies do not cover personal injury as a result of terrorist activity), including any relating to **pre-existing medical conditions**, or alcohol and drugs. Be sure to tell your insurer about any pre-existing medical conditions you may have, including any psychiatric illness. The policy may not be valid if you fail to do this, which could mean that you or your family and friends have to pay for any treatment. Remember to take the policy number and the 24-hour emergency number with you.
- > Make sure that all your **vaccinations are up to date** and find out about any other suggested **medical advice** by visiting your healthcare provider. Follow this advice and be aware of possible health risks during your trip. See www.dh.gov.uk, nathnac.org/travel and www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk for more information or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47. 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).
- > Register and update your details on our online registration system, LOCATE, at www.fco.gov.uk. Whether you are travelling or living overseas, the information you provide helps us to confirm quickly if you are safe, allowing us to concentrate on offering support to the people who are most in need, including after any catastrophe (see page 24).
- > Make sure you are aware of the **immigration and customs controls** of the country you are travelling to, including any necessary visas. For many countries, your passport needs to be valid for at least six months after the date you travel. You should contact the relevant Consulate in London for information about the immigration requirements of the country you are travelling to. It is your responsibility to make sure you have the correct visa for your stay in another country. If you are experiencing difficulties entering a country (for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid), consular staff will not be able to help you enter the country. They cannot get involved in another country's immigration policy or procedures. See www.ips.gov.uk/passport or call 0870 521 0410 for information about how to get a passport.
- > **Tell someone where you are going** and when you expect to be back. Leave an itinerary and details of where you might be able to be contacted during your time abroad. You should also make two copies of your passport (including pages with relevant visas), insurance details and any other important travel documents. Leave one copy at home with a family member or a reliable friend and take one copy with you, packed separately from your passport.

Note 2:

The European Economic Area is made up of all 27 members of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Note 3:

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

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

Special considerations

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

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

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

When you are there

- > **Be aware of security and take sensible precautions.** Leave your jewellery and valuables at home if you can. Only carry as much money as you need for the day. Leave the rest, and at least one credit card, in the hotel safe if one is available. Keep copies of your passport, insurance details and other important travel documents separate from the originals. It is useful to always have some form of identity on you, such as a driving licence or a photocopy of your passport. Stay aware of what is going on around you and keep away from situations where you do not feel comfortable. Find out from your guidebook or tour guide about any local scams. Keep up to date with local and regional events in the media. Don't take risks on holidays that you wouldn't take at home. If a situation looks dangerous, it probably is.
- > Keep a note of the local British Embassy, High Commission or **Consulate phone number** (see www.fco.gov.uk/travel for details about the country you are visiting). When you arrive, find out how to get in touch with the local emergency services in case you need them during your stay.
- > A passport is a valuable document, and you are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to **protect your passport**. The UK Border Agency has agreed a new policy which will make it more difficult to enter the UK without a passport. You should not try to travel to the UK on a driving licence or a local police report. While we can usually issue replacement passports 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 a replacement. In certain circumstances, we may need to restrict the validity of a replacement passport. We will explain this to you in full.

- > **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 catastrophe in the region in which you are travelling. Although you may feel perfectly safe, people at home may worry if they don't hear from you, and could report you missing. If you take your mobile phone with you abroad, make sure you have international roaming (the facility to use your phone on a foreign network), and an adaptor so that you can recharge your battery.
- > **You must obey local laws.** There may be very serious penalties for breaking a law which might seem trivial to you or for doing something which may not be illegal in the UK. 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 birdwatching or plane spotting, may be misunderstood (particularly near military sites). Filming or photographing demonstrations may also be seen as provocative in some countries. If in doubt, don't do it.
- > **Respect local customs** and behave and dress appropriately, particularly when visiting religious sites, markets and rural communities. Travel guidebooks, tour operators and hotel staff are all useful sources of information. If in doubt, take extra care. In some places, behaviour that would be acceptable elsewhere can lead to serious trouble. In some countries, it can also be worth asking for permission before taking any photographs so as not to cause offence. Help protect local wildlife and habitats by respecting rules and regulations including how to get rid of rubbish properly). Be aware that buying any wildlife products is risky. Customs departments throughout the world confiscate illegal souvenirs, and in the UK you could face a criminal prosecution and fines.
- > **Check that what you are bringing back to the UK is legal.** You can get more information from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (see www.defra.gov.uk or call 08459 335577) about bringing back meat, animal products or plants. You can get information about banned and restricted goods, and your customs allowances, from HM Revenue & Customs (see www.hmrc.gov.uk or call 0845 010 9000).
- > **Be aware of local attitudes to alcohol and know your own limit.** Remember that drinks served overseas are often stronger than those served in the UK. Keep your drinks with you at all times as drinks can 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. Avoid swimming or fooling around 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.** Never carry packages through customs for other people and be cautious about accepting gifts. If you are driving, do not lend your vehicle to other people and do not sit in someone else's vehicle when going through customs or crossing borders – get out and walk. Pack your own baggage, fasten it securely and do not leave it unattended. We have a leaflet called 'Drugs: Information for Travellers' which will give you more information. There are details on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under the heading 'Our publications'.
- > **Follow any health advice** you received before travelling (as mentioned on page 10). You should, for example, drink plenty of safe drinking water, use sunscreen, and take care what you eat and where you eat it.

- > We have lists of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors that are available on Embassy, High Commission or Consulate websites. We aim to check the accuracy of these lists at least once a year (see note 1 below).

If you are going to live abroad

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

Some of the main things to consider before you go

- > **Check relevant websites** for information. For example, our website (www.fco.gov.uk), the website of the British overseas mission in the country you are moving to, the website of the Embassy in the UK of the country concerned, and www.direct.gov.uk (under 'Britons living abroad').
- > **Find out about the healthcare system**, including costs, **and get a full health plan.** Many countries do not provide government-funded healthcare and your eligibility for treatment under the NHS may change. The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is not valid for non-UK residents and is no longer valid once you move abroad. 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. Useful websites for more information include www.direct.gov.uk and www.ageconcern.org.uk.
- > **Find out about welfare rights** abroad. Some UK benefits are not paid outside the UK. Others apply only in countries which have agreements with the UK (for more details, see www.dh.gov.uk). Tell your social security office, HM Revenue & Customs' National Insurance Contributions Office (International Services) and the Department for Work and Pensions when you move abroad and give them your contact details. You should also tell them if you change address again or return to the UK to live.
- > **Be clear about your financial situation and allow for changes to the exchange rate and inflation.** Find out about tax liability in the UK, social security benefits and National Insurance contributions, and get a State Pension forecast. Useful websites include www.dwp.gov.uk and www.hmrc.gov.uk. You should also **make a will.**
- > **Find out about accommodation.** Use an independent **lawyer** when buying property. Our websites provide lists of local English-speaking lawyers. We cannot give you legal advice ourselves or get involved in purchases or disputes.
- > Make sure that your **car** is in line with local regulations and that you have the necessary driving permit. We cannot help you export or import your car or personal belongings.
- > **Learn the language.** You will find 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 essential you have a **valid passport** (fill in the details of two relatives or friends on the back page) and **any necessary visas.**

Note 1:

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

If you are retiring overseas

- > **Contact associations or charities for advice.** Age Concern (www.ageconcern.org.uk) and www.direct.gov.uk have advice on planning and preparing for your move abroad, as well as what to do and who to contact if things don't go according to plan. For information on what it's like to live overseas, see the Saga website at www.saga.co.uk.
- > Get **independent tax advice** about the benefits of offshore banking, as this could reduce the amount of tax you are responsible for paying.
- > Remember that British nationals generally have to 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 (www.dwp.gov.uk) or the Citizens Advice website (www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

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 will 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, National Insurance 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 overseas mission in your area.
- > You can find more information in our leaflet, 'Going to live abroad', which is available on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.

Remember!

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

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

Major catastrophes

We may offer exceptional help in a catastrophe (see page 24), but please remember the following.

- > If you are travelling or living overseas, you should register and update your details on our online registration system, 'LOCATE' (see page 24). This helps us to confirm quickly if you are safe, allowing us to concentrate on offering support to the people who are most in need after any catastrophe.
- > It may take some time to get help to you if the infrastructure has been affected by the catastrophe (for example, if telephone lines are down, if bridges have collapsed or if access to roads has been blocked). Access may also be impossible if the local authorities have sealed off the area where you are.

If something happens to you

This section describes the range of support we can normally offer if things go wrong. If you are caught up in a major catastrophe, a different level of support may be available – for more details, see pages 24 and 25.

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 traveller's cheques**. You may also want to have your bank or a relative send money to you using a reliable money transfer company. Our staff can give you information about this if you need it.

Lost or stolen passports

- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad and you urgently need to travel, **we can issue a replacement travel document** once we are satisfied of your identity and that you are a British national. You will need to produce a police report, fill in an application form and pay a fee.
- > Depending on the circumstances and the country you are in, the replacement travel document may be:
 - an 'Emergency Travel Document', which is valid for a single journey
 - a standard passport.

To issue a passport, we need to make checks, and you may be asked to attend an interview. This all takes time and could mean you have to delay your travel arrangements. You should make sure that your travel insurance covers you if this happens.

- > If our staff have to issue an 'Emergency Travel Document' outside normal office hours, you will have to pay an extra fee. Before you contact us, consider whether you will also need an exit visa from the local immigration authorities. Some countries do not issue these visas outside normal office hours.

Financial help

- > If you run out of money abroad, we can give you **information on how to transfer money** and we can help you to contact relatives and friends who may be willing to transfer money to you or to buy you a ticket back to the UK. If we transfer money on your behalf, we will charge you for this.
- > We cannot provide money if we have contacted family or friends for you. For example, if you have had to go into hospital, we cannot give them money to help with travel or accommodation if they visit you.
- > There is **no right** to receive emergency financial help from us. It is important that you have full travel insurance as we **cannot pay your bills** for you. If you don't have travel insurance, you will be liable for any costs you are charged. **A discretionary loan from public funds to help you return to the UK may only be considered in very exceptional circumstances** and only if you have completely used up all other methods of getting funds. You will have to **sign an 'undertaking to repay' the loan**, and will need to show that you have a UK address and the ability to pay back the money. In most cases, you will have to secure this loan by giving up your passport to our staff, who can issue you with an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to the UK. We will not return your passport to you, and the UK Identity and Passport Service will not issue you with a replacement passport, until you have repaid the loan in full. It is up to us to decide whether we grant these loans – a lack of other ways for you to return to the UK does not mean that we will automatically agree to a loan. For suggestions about how to help yourself if you have financial problems overseas, see the 'Travel money' section of our travel website **www.fco.gov.uk/travel**.

Victims of crimes overseas

- > We can give general **information about local police and legal procedures**. We **cannot give you legal advice**, but we can point you in the right direction of where to get it.
- > If you need medical treatment, we can help you to contact a local doctor.
- > If you want us to, we can contact your relatives and friends and let them know what has happened. We can offer you financial help only in line with our policy set out in the 'Financial help' section of this guide.
- > **We cannot collect evidence or investigate crimes** ourselves, and in many countries investigating authorities and the courts will refuse to answer enquiries from other people and organisations, including consuls. So, 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 go to 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 can help (www.victimsupport.org).
- > If you are injured in a violent crime in another EU country, you may be able to apply for compensation from other EU countries with the help of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (see www.cica.gov.uk or call 0800 358 3601).
- > We have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad', which offers more detailed information. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/travel, under 'Our publications'.

Victims of rape or sexual assault overseas

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

British nationals who go into hospital overseas

- > We aim to **contact you within 24 hours of being told** that you have been admitted to hospital.
- > We do not usually contact or visit people who have travelled specifically for medical treatment.
- > If you are in hospital as a **result of an assault or other crime, we will visit you as soon as possible**.
- > In all other cases, we will take account of factors such as your condition, your ability to speak on the phone, whether you have relatives or friends with you, whether you have a tour company representative and the standard of medical facilities before deciding whether a visit is appropriate. If we believe a visit is appropriate and there is a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the same city as the hospital you are in, **we aim to visit you within 48 hours** of being told that you have gone into hospital.
- > If you want, we can contact your family or friends in the UK to tell them that you are in hospital.
- > If you want, we can help you to consult your insurance company or medical evacuation company. Remember to **keep any receipts or doctors' notes** in case you need them to make a claim. Using the resources that are available to us, we may also be able to help you communicate with hospital staff if they do not speak English.
- > If you are travelling within the European Economic Area (see note 2 on page 10) or Switzerland, you should carry a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which will entitle you to medical treatment at a reduced cost, or free of charge in some cases. If you normally live in the UK, you can apply for the EHIC at any point, even after medical treatment has become necessary or started (see www.ehic.org.uk).
- > We cannot pay medical bills.

Mental illness

- > **Facilities for dealing with mental illness vary widely** around the world. In some countries, facilities do not have enough resources, in others expensive privately-run clinics are the only real option and, in some places, people with mental illness may be detained by the police instead of being admitted to hospital.
- > If you are mentally ill and want our help, we will do our best to make sure you receive medical help and advice, wherever you are. But we cannot provide this help and advice ourselves, or pay medical bills.
- > If you have run out of a prescribed medication, we can give you information on getting supplies locally. You should be aware, however, that in some countries your medication might be banned or unavailable.
- > If you want, we can contact your family and friends in the UK.
- > If necessary, we can help local medical staff contact medical staff in the UK who may be able to provide advice on your medical history and who may be the most appropriate people to offer continued support if you return to the UK.
- > You may find that your insurance policy does not cover mental illness, or is not valid because you did not declare a pre-existing condition. In these cases, you or your family must **expect to pay for any treatment**.

Forced marriage of a British national abroad

- > If you are a British national in the UK and are worried about being forced into a marriage abroad, you should contact our **Forced Marriage Unit** by e-mail to fm@fco.gov.uk, by phone on 020 7008 0151 or, outside office hours, by phoning our switchboard on 020 7008 1500. It is essential that you think carefully before deciding whether to travel to the country concerned.
 - > If you are overseas and fear that you are going to be forced into a marriage, you should try to **contact, or preferably go to, the nearest British Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate**. You will find contact details in local phone books, hotels and tourist offices, or on our website at www.fco.gov.uk. If you cannot get there, we can still try to help you, within the limits of local law.
 - > **We can try to help you get back to the UK**, if that is what you want. If possible, we can also try to find you temporary accommodation in the country you are in.
 - > We have a leaflet called 'What is a forced marriage?' with more information. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.
- > Our staff are there to **support you and to take an interest in your welfare**. We aim to be sensitive and non-judgemental. We also aim to treat everyone in prison or detention the same, no matter what they are being held for, or whether they are on remand or have been sentenced. You should stay in touch with our staff and ask for their help, as they have experience in dealing with many of the problems you may face.
 - > But, **we cannot get you out of prison or detention**, nor can we get special treatment for you because you are British.
 - > If you want us to, we can tell your family or friends that you have been arrested. If you are thinking about not telling your family, please consider the distress it may cause them if they are not told where you are. It can also be a disadvantage to you if you need money for anything in prison or fall ill. Once we have told your family and friends, we can pass messages between you in places where phone or postal services are not available.
 - > Although we **cannot give legal advice, start legal proceedings or investigate a crime**, we can **offer basic information about the local legal system**, including whether a legal-aid scheme is available. We can give you a list of local interpreters and local lawyers if you want, although **we cannot pay** for either. It is important to consider carefully whether you want to have legal representation and to discuss all the costs beforehand with the legal representative.
 - > We can offer you **information about the local prison or remand system**, including visiting arrangements, mail and censorship, privileges, work possibilities, and social and welfare services. We can also explain where there are different regulations for remand prisoners and sentenced prisoners. For example, in some countries, prisoners are allowed to send more mail when they are on remand.
 - > If appropriate, we will **consider** approaching the local authorities if you are not **treated in line with internationally-accepted standards**. This may include if your trial does not follow internationally-recognised standards for a fair trial or is unreasonably delayed compared to local cases.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

- > If you are arrested or held in custody or prison in a country overseas, the authorities in that country should ask you whether you want them to contact the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. However, you can also ask for this to be done, and should do so particularly if you are charged with a serious offence.
- > We will aim to **contact you, depending on local procedures, within 24 hours of being told** about your arrest or detention. If you want us to, we will then aim to visit you as soon as possible.

- > We can also help to put you in touch with the charity Fair Trials International (www.fairtrials.net).
- > With your permission, we can **take up any justified complaint** about ill treatment, personal safety, or discrimination with the police or prison authorities. Again, with your permission, we can make sure that any **medical or dental problems** you might have are brought to the attention of any police or prison doctor.
- > If you are in prison in a European Union country, or in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, the USA, Australia or New Zealand, we aim to visit you once after sentencing and then after that only if there is a real need. In other countries, while you are in prison we aim to visit you at least once a year, although we may visit you more often if necessary.
- > Within certain limits, we can **send you money from your family**. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service. In some countries, depending on the rules of the prison where you are being held, we can help to buy prison 'comforts' with money sent by your family, friends or other people. We can also offer to put you in touch with the prisoners' welfare charity, Prisoners Abroad (visit www.prisonersabroad.org.uk or phone 020 7561 6820).
- > We may be able to give you information about any local procedures for a prisoner's early release in exceptional circumstances. These procedures are generally known as **pardon or clemency**. We will only **consider** supporting pardon or clemency pleas:
 - in compelling compassionate circumstances, such as where a prisoner or close family member is chronically ill or dying and this would leave no-one to care for dependants
 - in cases of minors imprisoned overseas
 - as a last resort, in cases where we have evidence that seems to point to a miscarriage of justice.
- > We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. If you are facing a charge that carries the death penalty, or if you have been sentenced to death, we will normally raise your case at whatever stage and level we judge to be appropriate.
- > We can explain to you how you may be **able to apply to transfer to a prison in the UK** if you are in a country from which prison transfers are possible. We have a leaflet called 'Transfers home for prisoners abroad' with more details.
- > The local authorities may have a policy of **deporting** foreign nationals after they have completed a prison sentence and we cannot prevent them from applying it to you, even if you had previously lived in the country before your prison sentence.
- > You should be aware that **if you are arrested for certain serious offences, such as child sex abuse or drugs crimes, our staff must tell other relevant UK authorities** (see note 1 below).
- > We have a leaflet called 'In prison abroad' with more information. You will find more details of this leaflet, and the one on transfers, on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.

Note 1:

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

If something happens to a relative or partner

This section explains what support we aim to offer the partners or relatives of a British national who dies or suffers some other serious misfortune abroad. There may be a different level of support if the person affected has been caught up in a major catastrophe (see pages 24 and 25).

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, families should appoint a single family representative who we can deal with as the case continues. As far as possible, we will make sure that this person has a single point of contact with a member of our staff.
- > In cases of death abroad, we will deal only with the next of kin or the person the next of kin has asked 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 will also decide whether to ask a local UK police force to use a family liaison officer (FLO) to advise and help the family to deal with the investigation. The relevant UK police force will make the final decision as to whether an FLO is appointed.

Deaths abroad from natural causes

- > If the person who died was travelling with a tour company, the company will often contact the person's next of kin themselves. If the death of a British national abroad is reported to us, and their next of kin is not present, **we will ask the UK police to tell the next of kin** as soon as possible. If the next of kin is not in the UK, we will ask our consular staff in the country where they are to do this. 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 to our staff overseas the next of kin's wishes about dealing with the body. We will do our best to make sure that these wishes are carried out. However, **post-mortem examinations may be carried out by the local authorities without the permission of the next of kin**. You should also be aware that, in some countries, organs may be removed and kept during these procedures without the next of kin being informed or consulted.

- > If you want us to, we can tell you the cost of local burial and local cremation (where local authorities allow these for foreigners) or of transporting the body and personal belongings back to the UK (known as 'repatriation'). You should be aware that, in some countries, a lack of suitable storage may make it impossible to get the necessary international certificates to transport the body. While **we cannot pay any burial, cremation or repatriation expenses** ourselves or settle any debts, we **can help transfer money** from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs. If you want us to, we can provide lists of local and international funeral directors. If an English-speaking firm is not available, our staff can help you with the arrangements.
- > A coroner in England and Wales will normally hold an inquest if a person died a violent or unnatural death overseas and the body is returned to the coroner's district. Different procedures for investigating deaths apply in each part of the UK. We have a booklet called 'Guide for bereaved families', which you can find on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.
- > In the case of a major catastrophe or terrorist attack, local practices overseas may change, and there may be delays with bodies being returned to the UK due to identification procedures.
- > **All deaths must be registered in the country where the person died.** We can advise you how to do this. You will need documents about you and the person who has died, including, for example, the full name, date of birth and passport number of the person who has died. The local authorities will need to be told if the person suffered from an infectious condition (such as hepatitis or HIV) so they can take precautions against infection.
- > **You do not have to register a death at the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate.** However, by doing so, you can get a UK-style death certificate, and a permanent copy of it will always be available in English from the General Register Office in the UK. In certain countries, British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates cannot currently issue death certificates and the local ones are suitable for British purposes. These countries are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland and South Africa.

- > In the UK there are a number of organisations that can support and help bereaved families and friends to understand their grief and come to terms with their loss. Useful websites include www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk and www.samaritans.org.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Death overseas', which you can find on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.

Death of a British national abroad in suspicious circumstances

- > As well as the support we can offer if someone dies from natural causes, **where there is evidence of suspicious circumstances we can suggest the best way to raise concerns** with the local authorities.
- > We can also offer **basic information about the local police system and legal system**, including any legal aid that is available. We can provide lists of local lawyers and local interpreters (although we do not pay for either) and, where possible, details of support groups. In all cases where you, as next of kin, have concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death, we suggest you get professional legal advice.
- > We **cannot investigate deaths** ourselves and, in many countries, investigating authorities and the courts will refuse to answer enquiries, including from British consular staff. In these circumstances, it is very important to consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court and follow any trial for you.
- > We will **consider making appropriate representations** to the local authorities if there are concerns that the investigation is not being carried out in line with local procedures or if there are justified complaints about discrimination against the person who has died or their family. You should be aware that the **standard of investigative procedures and expertise varies** greatly across the world.

- > Consular staff in London are available to **meet family** representatives. They can contact the next of kin if the investigating authorities tell us about any new developments. Where possible, if the next of kin visits the country during the early stages of the investigation and initial court hearings relating to the death, our staff there may be able to meet them.
- > As mentioned already, 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. Some, such as 'Support after murder and manslaughter', can help you face the problems and difficulties that arise from death overseas under suspicious circumstances (www.sammabroad.org.uk).
- > We also have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad' which you may also find helpful. You can find details on www.fco.gov.uk/travel under 'Our publications'.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

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

- > **If your relative or friend has asked us to, we will tell you as soon as we can that they have been detained or held in prison.** However, to protect their privacy, we will not normally provide any details of the detention or arrest, or tell you how to contact them, unless they have given us permission.
- > We can provide general information about the country involved, prison conditions and the local legal system.
- > 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 the prisoner to buy prison 'comforts', use the phone and so on. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service.

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

Missing people

- > If you are in the UK and worried about a British national who you think is missing abroad, we can let you know how to produce a **missing person's report** for your local police so Interpol enquiries can begin.
- > Although we **cannot carry out physical searches** on your behalf, we can give you **information about appropriate local authorities**. We can also give you contact details for any relevant local charitable and voluntary organisations specialising in tracing missing people. Where appropriate, we can give you information about the federation or association of any local private-detective agencies.
- > If you want, consular staff in London can meet family representatives, maintain contact with you and tell you about any new developments which we find out about.

British nationals kidnapped or taken hostage overseas

- > If a British national is taken hostage overseas, we will do everything we properly can to make sure he or she is released safely. **We will work with the government in that country, although that government will take the lead in dealing with the situation.**
- > **We will not make substantive concessions to hostage takers. Substantive concessions would include paying a ransom, changing government policy or releasing prisoners.**
- > A **dedicated team in London** will act as caseworkers for the family and will make sure that the family is 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 the family in touch with other specialist agencies such as Hostage UK (www.hostageuk.org).

- > When a British hostage is released, we will meet him or her and help them make contact with their family. If necessary, we can help them to:
 - find local accommodation
 - arrange a medical check-up
 - arrange travel to the UK.

International child abduction

- > If you are worried about your child being abducted overseas by the other parent or a relative, you should contact our **Child Abduction Section** on 020 7008 0878 (or our switchboard on 020 7008 1500 outside office hours).
- > If your child has been abducted, we can tell you whether the country your child has been taken to has joined the **Hague Convention on International Child Abduction**. If it has, we can put you in touch with the relevant authorities in the UK, who can ask the court in the country concerned to make an order for the child to be returned to the UK.
- > If the country your child has been taken to has not joined the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, we can give you a list of overseas lawyers who speak English. Some may be specialists in family law. However, we cannot pay any legal fees ourselves.
- > We can give you basic practical **information about the customs and legal procedures of the country** your child has been taken to. 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 Interpol directly for help in tracing your child. If your child is found, **and if the other parent agrees, we may be able to check on your child's welfare for you** if the country's government cannot offer this facility. If you know which country your child is in, but do not know their exact whereabouts, we can contact the relevant authorities to check what progress has been made in finding him or her.
- > We will consider whether it is appropriate to ask a court overseas to handle any case as quickly as possible in the best interests of your child. With the UK court's permission, we can tell the courts overseas about any UK court orders in place. But **often, UK court orders cannot be enforced overseas and similar orders have to be applied for in the local courts.**
- > We can consider ways to help establish and keep open lines of communication between you, the other parent and 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 cannot 'rescue' a child, help illegally to remove them from where they are staying, or illegally facilitate their return to the UK.
- > We have a leaflet called 'International child abduction' (with more general information) and a separate leaflet on 'Child abduction in Pakistan' (with details of an agreement between senior judges in the UK and Pakistan about handling these cases). You will find details on **www.fco.gov.uk/travel** under 'Our publications'.

If you are affected by a terrorist attack or a major catastrophe

The main part of this guide relates to the help we normally provide for British nationals who are in difficulty overseas. This section deals with exceptional events for which an exceptional level of support may be appropriate.

Terrorist attacks

We have put in place and regularly review what are known as our Exceptional Assistance Measures for the **victims of terrorist attacks abroad**, and their families. These measures take account of the exceptional nature of terrorism in which individuals are random victims of attacks directed at society as a whole. The details and availability of that help **will vary according to the particular circumstances** of each situation, and we can only provide it 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 would not provide this financial help if victims have travelled against our travel advice, or if they did not take out any travel insurance.

Depending on the circumstances, the help we might consider offering on top of our normal support may include, for example:

- > medical evacuation for people who have been injured or evacuation for people in danger (this may not necessarily be to the UK but to a safe place in the region)
- > paying immediate medical expenses
- > transporting bodies or remains back home
- > paying the costs to return the luggage of the people who have been killed or injured
- > travel for two members of the victim's family to the site of the attack
- > accommodation and travel insurance.

Major catastrophes

If there is a major catastrophe, we will consider whether to offer exceptional help to those British nationals who are directly affected.

For example, following the **tsunami** which struck southern Asia in December 2004, and **Hurricane Katrina** in the US in August 2005, we offered exceptional help to the British victims and their families.

Following any major catastrophes in the future, **the Foreign Secretary will make a decision as soon as possible on whether we need to offer exceptional help and what that help should be**, bearing in mind the circumstances of the catastrophe and the resources available. The factors that the Foreign Secretary can consider in making that decision may include, for example, whether there has been a breakdown of basic local services, transport etc, preventing British nationals from getting support directly, or whether large numbers of British nationals have lost all forms of identification, travel documents, insurance policies, belongings etc, as a result of the catastrophe.

Civil unrest

We also have separate measures in place in **countries where there is considered to be a significant risk of civil unrest**. You should check our travel advice website before travelling (see www.fco.gov.uk/travel). If you are living or travelling overseas, you should also register and update your details on our online registration system, 'LOCATE', at www.fco.gov.uk. This helps us to confirm quickly if you are safe, allowing us to concentrate on offering support to the people who are most in need during any civil unrest. If there is civil unrest in the country, you should follow the public advice given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate (by text or e-mail or through the BBC World Service), or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf throughout the country. If you do not follow our advice to leave a country during civil unrest or other times of crisis, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to help you to leave the country at a later stage. **You should be aware that your insurance may no longer be valid if you do not follow our advice.**

Avian and pandemic flu

There is international concern that outbreaks of avian flu may trigger a worldwide human flu pandemic at some point in the future. If a human flu pandemic does break out, it is likely that the virus will spread very quickly, possibly affecting many countries.

We are working with the Department of Health to prepare for a possible pandemic. We have put in place pandemic flu emergency plans for all British diplomatic or consular missions overseas, so that we can try to maintain basic consular support for British nationals who are living or travelling overseas during a pandemic. British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates overseas will only be able to provide information on what local medicine or healthcare is available. They will not be able to provide Tamiflu (a drug to treat flu) or medical treatment. As a result, British nationals overseas need to take personal responsibility for their own health, consulting employers if appropriate.

We will also not be in the position to offer British nationals transport back to the UK during a pandemic, mainly because of the large numbers of people involved and the difficulties in doing so. In the worst-case scenario, we may also have to close some diplomatic or consular missions temporarily.

For more information about avian and pandemic flu and what you can do if there is a pandemic, and for information about what support we can provide, see our website at www.fco.gov.uk/travel. You can also visit the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu.

For family and friends of victims

In all these kinds of major catastrophe, we aim to provide a **reliable link with both victims and the family members who contact us**. We will normally provide special phone numbers. We can provide more phone lines immediately after a catastrophe, and have an agreement with the UK police to use their call centres if necessary.

After initial contact, we will try to stay in touch with the most appropriate family member (normally the next of kin). We recognise that a lack of information can cause more anxiety so we aim to provide information throughout these kinds of catastrophes.

But, we will pass on only what we are confident are reliable facts – anything else is likely to cause more confusion and distress. Using our online registration system, 'LOCATE', at www.fco.gov.uk helps us to gain reliable information.

If you are aware that a relative or friend is in the area affected by a catastrophe, you may also want to consider the following **suggestions from families** of previous catastrophe victims.

- > Try to **find out the exact location** of your relative or friend – for example, by checking their itinerary and trying to contact them on hotel and mobile numbers.
- > **Nominate one family member** to act as a contact for any authorities, including contacting our helpline. Agree a list of relevant information about your relative or friend which they should have close to hand. This should include their full name and date of birth, passport number, details of travel (tour company, travel insurance) and the names of anyone else travelling with them.
- > **Think carefully before you travel to the area affected**, particularly if the catastrophe has affected local services, transport and so on. You may find that, because of a lack of transport or accommodation, you end up needing help yourself. Each catastrophe is different, but in some cases you can achieve more by staying in the UK and consulting us and other organisations. Consult other people and organisations before making a decision. Websites such as www.disasteraction.org.uk can be useful.

Aftercare when you return to the UK

We provide support to British nationals abroad. But often, victims of major catastrophes overseas, or their families, need further help when they return to the UK. The **Humanitarian Assistance Unit in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport** (DCMS) will work with the relevant agencies and services to help victims to get the aftercare they need. For information about the DCMS' aftercare, see www.direct.gov.uk/helpafterincident. We cannot provide compensation for people who have been affected by a terrorist attack or major catastrophe.

Providing the best support we can

Our departmental strategic objective: support British nationals abroad

We have agreed with HM Treasury four main areas to target for providing effective and efficient support to help distressed British nationals. The Consular Strategy structures our work around the following four areas for the three-year period from 2008–2009 to 2010–2011.

- 1 Quality of assistance**
- 2 Professionalism of our staff**
- 3 Consistent delivery**
- 4 Business efficiency**

We assess our performance in each area using a wide range of indicators, including the following.

- > We will contact 99% of people who are in hospital within 24 hours of being told about them.
- > We will contact 98% of people who have been detained within 24 hours of being told about their arrest, and then visit them as soon as possible if they want us to.
- > 90% of the people we help are satisfied with the help we give them.

Our performance against all our performance indicators is included in our yearly departmental reports. Once we have published the reports, we make them available on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Each year we carry out a specific sampling and consultation exercise with a broad range of people who have received our help. This allows us to identify those areas where we can do better. Our consular sections overseas must also carry out regular surveys on the quality of the help they give.

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. If you have any comments on the support you received, please write to the address below.

Feedback
Strategy, Communications and Training Group
Consular Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Old Admiralty Building
Spring Gardens
London
SW1A 2PA

Phone: 020 7008 1500
Fax: 020 7008 0152
E-mail: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

Official complaints procedure

If you are not satisfied and want to make an official complaint, please write to the FCO Director of Consular Services at the address below.

Consular Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Old Admiralty Building
Spring Gardens
London
SW1A 2PA

Phone: 020 7008 1500
Fax: 020 7008 0152
E-mail: complaint.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

- > We will investigate your complaint fully. The Director will see all complaints. He or she will ask for the investigation to be carried out by a member of staff who is not directly connected to your case or to your complaint. This person will usually be senior to any officer who a complaint has been made against.
- > 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 help and support.
- > If you are not satisfied with the response you receive, you can write directly to either a Foreign Office Minister or your Member of Parliament (MP), asking them to raise your complaint with us.
- > If you have made your complaint through your MP and are still not happy with the reply that we have given, you can contact the Parliamentary Ombudsman (also called the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration). The Ombudsman will normally only consider cases relating to 'maladministration' (that is, poor administration or applying rules incorrectly). There are more details about this on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk.

Appendix

Categories of British nationals

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Giving us feedback

If you need to get in touch with a British Consulate when you are overseas, we would welcome any comments on the help you received. Please send an e-mail to feedback.conular.services@fco.gov.uk.

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