



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Consular Directorate
Strategy & Network Department
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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Date: 19 February 2014

Dear ,

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REF 0032-14

I refer to your email of 2 January in which you requested, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provide information as follows:

- “1. How many nationals abroad do your embassies assist in a year?”***
- 2. How many UK nationals are there in Thailand? How many requests per year in Thailand?”***
- 3. What is the nature of the most requests? e.g. from those incarcerated, having medical emergencies or what? How many requests in a year would concern financial assistance?”***
- 4. I understand that any assistance loan is made at the discretion of the government but could you provide me with several examples of under what conditions such a loan has been made in the past?”***
- 5. Concerning the logistics of loan payback, must the loanee have a pension or the like from which the government can directly deduct the payback payments?”***
- 6. The government literature mentions that a passport may be held in security for an assistance loan. How does this square with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 12 (2) and (4)) that gives the right under the aforesaid clauses for everyone to leave and return to his own country?”***

Firstly I would like to apologise that we were unable to supply the information within 20 working days as required by the Act; we do try and achieve this wherever possible – however in this case it took longer than anticipated for a number of reasons including the need to consult a wide number of FCO and external stakeholders.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does have information relevant to your request. The answers to your questions, as far as we are able to provide, are as detailed below in the same chronological order.

1. Between January and December 2013 FCO records indicate that **45,745** cases of Consular Assistance were provided by British diplomatic and consular missions globally (including the issue of Emergency Travel Documents).
2. We do not hold figures for the number of British nationals who live and work overseas as there is no mandatory requirement for British nationals to register with us.

However, according to a report by the *Institute for Public Policy Research* (IPPR) in 2010, there were approximately **46,000** British nationals living or working in Thailand for a year or longer (based on data collated in 2009).

Our records show that there were **1,915** requests for Consular Assistance in Thailand (Jan-Dec 2013).

3. The Top Ten requests for Consular Assistance in Thailand for Jan-Dec 2013 were:

Thailand - Top Ten Assistance cases Jan-Dec 2013	Number of cases**
Emergency Travel Documents (ETDs)	676**
Deaths	384
Hospitalisation	288
Detention	160
Financial Transactions	90
Whereabouts	65
Missing Persons	56
Welfare	54
Accident – General	38
Assault –General	30
TOTAL	1,841

*All data taken from the Consular database Jedox – January 2014

** Data taken from Bridge January 2014

Our record of invoices issued show that our Posts in Thailand made 28 loans to British nationals for which the recipient signed an Undertaking To Repay (UTR) between January and December 2013.

4. Discretionary loans from public funds to help people return to the UK are only considered in exceptional circumstances and only if the person has exhausted all other methods of getting funds. The person is required to sign an 'undertaking to repay' the loan. In most cases, the person will have to secure the loan by giving up their passport to our staff, who then issue them with an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to the UK, the cost of which is added to the loan. Her Majesty's Passport Office will not issue the person with a replacement passport until they have repaid the loan in full.

Some examples of loans provided are below. In each case the recipients were considered to be particularly vulnerable.

- A man contacted the Consulate after losing all of his money. His family was not able to assist him financially. The man was living rough and risked overstaying on his visa. A loan was provided to cover costs including Emergency Travel Document and flight to the UK.
- A man with a number of health problems contacted our Consulate after missing his return flight to the UK and subsequently ended up sleeping roughly. A loan was provided to cover the cost of local travel, Emergency Travel Document and return flight to the UK.

In our public communications we advise that travellers buy fully comprehensive travel and medical insurance, which covers any pre-existing medical conditions, before they travel to help cover any unexpected costs in the case of an emergency.

If a British national runs out of money abroad, we can provide information on how to transfer money and we can help people contact relatives and friends who may be willing to transfer money or to purchase a ticket back to the UK for them.

5. There is no requirement for the recipient of the loan to be in receipt of a pension or any other regular payment. We do not directly deduct any repayments due.
6. When we issue a loan and retain a full validity passport as a result, we issue the customer with an emergency travel document to enable them to return to their country of residence. The customer when agreeing to the loan is fully aware that until they repay it their passport will be retained. Should they then wish to travel again, they can repay the loan and re-apply for a passport; our policy is therefore fully aligned with Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The FCO can neither confirm nor deny whether the above information represents all the information held that would meet the terms of your request, as the duty to comply with section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act does not apply by virtue of sections 23(5). Section 23 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. We do not therefore have to apply the public interest test.

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