



Home Office

Crisis situations: supporting our customers

Version 4.0

This guidance is for His Majesty's Passport Office staff who need to know how to respond to crisis events in the UK and overseas

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About this guidance

This guidance tells HM Passport Office operational staff how we respond to crisis situations and the consideration we must give about passports during an emergency or when a declaration of exceptional assistance measures has been made.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **4.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **26 September 2022**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This guidance has been updated to reflect the change in our sovereign from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to His Majesty King Charles III.

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Crisis incidents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about crisis incidents and exceptional assistance measures that may impact customers in the United Kingdom and overseas.

Crisis situations can involve and affect British nationals in the UK or overseas. There are 4 types of incidents that may prompt a crisis response.

Political and civil unrest

This may be a situation where the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) advises British nationals to leave a country or be evacuated due to war or political instability.

Natural and manmade disasters

This is when large numbers of British nationals may have been killed (or injured) by natural or manmade disaster and the danger continues. This includes major transport incidents, disease pandemics, natural disasters and terrorist incidents where the FCDO has declared exceptional assistance measures. This may also include events that can cause hardship and severe disruption to British nationals (for example, volcanic ash and major airport shutdowns). Other examples of natural or manmade disasters are:

- floods
- earthquakes
- hurricanes and tsunamis
- nuclear incidents
- major fires

Exceptional assistance measures

[Exceptional assistance measures \(EAMs\)](#) is the term for specific help the UK government can give to British victims of terrorist incidents overseas and their families.

Emergency assistance overseas

The FCDO also uses the term 'emergency assistance overseas' to include political or civil unrest and manmade or natural disasters where British nationals are at risk or have been impacted by these events.

Where 'emergency assistance overseas' is required the UK government will provide additional assistance above normal consular services through embassies and consulates.

Crisis response announcements

In the UK, a crisis response will normally be announced by the Cabinet Office but may also be announced through a specific department (for example, the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for flooding or the Home Office for a terrorist event).

An overseas response may include evacuation, financial assistance or help offered in the country where the crisis event has taken place. In the UK, the response will normally be in 2 phases:

- coping with the specific event
- longer term support (if needed) to recover from the impacts

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How the UK government supports British nationals in a crisis

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth & Development Office do during a crisis.

The action that the Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) take during a crisis, will depend on if the crisis is:

- in the UK
- overseas

Crisis in the UK

During a UK based crisis event, the Home Office will establish a Gold Command to coordinate its response. The Gold Command will be a group of senior decision makers from across the Home Office who will consider the impact of the event on British nationals. It will include a representative from HM Passport Office, as well as from UK Visas & Immigration.

The Gold Command will help HM Passport Office decide:

- what help we can provide
- what passport application types will be considered (for example, renewals or first-time applications)
- under what circumstances we will issue urgent replacement passports (through counter or remote applications)
- whether to waive passport fees

The announcement of a crisis response does not mean that HM Passport Office and the wider Home Office will always provide services free of charge (for example, free passports).

If a Gold Command is not established, the director general of HM Passport Office will consider what response to take, following discussion with ministers and the permanent secretary.

A list of the most current Home Office contacts will be shared with HM Passport Office leadership teams at this point and must be used during a state of crisis in the UK.

Crisis Overseas

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) will establish an equivalent Gold Command for overseas crisis events, with representation from the relevant Home Office departments. The FCDO will:

- consider any incidents overseas and decide when to declare a crisis
- work with other departments to agree on a response
- declare the end of a crisis overseas

Declaring the end of a crisis overseas does not always mean the assistance ends. For example, HM Passport Office may allow free passport applications for a number of weeks or months after the event.

The announcement of a crisis response overseas does not mean that HM Passport Office and the wider Home Office will always provide services free of charge (for example, free passports).

The FCDO may decide that repatriation (assisting the return of an individual to the UK), temporarily moving individuals to a safer area (or country) or providing a free Emergency Travel Document (ETD) is enough support.

The Home Office will decide on its response to the crisis, consider the situation in light of any legislation and decide if we need to offer free passports, visas or other services to our customers.

The Home Office will always inform the FCDO of the types of help they are offering so that British nationals are aware of HM Government assistance (see specific [guidance that the FCDO provides to the public in crisis events](#)). A list of the most current FCDO contacts will be shared with HM Passport Office leadership teams at this point and must be used during a state of crisis overseas.

The FCDO and HM Passport Office will help affected overseas customers apply for (and receive) travel documents (within reason). Our help may be delayed by the loss of infrastructure overseas or the need to wait for customers to travel to a safe haven.

Customers have a general responsibility for their own safety, especially if they have travelled to (or live) in a high-risk location against the advice of the FCDO. Customers must expect to have to travel and co-operate with the FCDO to gain access to any assistance they offer.

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Dealing with passport applications during crisis situations

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about our role during a crisis.

Before, during and after a crisis, HM Passport Office has a number of responsibilities to support any British nationals who have a current passport, are applying for a new one or who have never held a British passport.

How we will tell staff about specific crisis measures

Guidance & Quality (G&Q) will produce and circulate guidance specific to an event once the crisis response has been agreed. G&Q will also provide lines to take for the Customer Service Management team (CSMT) and Teleperformance.

This guidance will cover any specific actions that HM Passport Office operational staff must follow for the period that we offer support.

If specific guidance is not available, HM Passport Office staff must raise any questions through their senior management teams, if they are contacted by:

- customers
- Members of Parliament
- the press

We will consider how we deal with passport applications:

- to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports
- to renew a passport
- from British nationals who have not held a passport before

Before you issue a passport, in all cases you (the examiner) must be satisfied with the customer's:

- nationality
- identity
- entitlement

If you have any fraud concerns when dealing with the application, you must refer it to a Counter Fraud team (CFT).

Passports lost, stolen and damaged during a crisis

Customers may find it difficult (or be unable) to quickly report a loss, theft or damage during a crisis event, as they may not have access to the internet or any local services overseas.

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (FCDO) may still be able to report passports as lost or stolen to HM Passport Office using their Casebook system.

HM Passport Office's crisis specific guidance must cover any issues or exceptions relating to how customer's report lost or stolen passports.

Checks and interventions during a crisis situation

While customers will always need to provide HM Passport Office with evidence of their nationality, identity and entitlement, there may be times where it's necessary to change the application process.

Access to the Data Validation Application (DVA) used by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) posts overseas to confirm passport details may also be disrupted during a crisis.

HM Passport Office may consider speeding up some checks so we can provide passports quickly (for example, prioritising check responses with other government departments who are aware of the crisis. We may also change the types of checks and interventions we usually follow, (for example, we may remove the need for a countersignatory or digital referee if the FCDO has confirmed the customer's identity). We will produce specific guidance to tell staff what they must do in these situations.

You, the examiner, must not issue a passport until you are satisfied that you have completed all checks correctly

Application requirements

HM Passport Office will provide specific guidance to staff and customers during a crisis once the Gold Command have agreed assistance. Supporting our customers during a crisis means we may need to consider changing or waiving any of the usual application requirements. We must always apply discretion, consider the individual circumstances and make our decisions on a case by case basis.

We must consider:

- where in the process a passport application is and where any documentation is likely to be (for example, is the document in the post already or can the document be sent to us)
- if the customer will be able to provide additional information or attend an interview (for example, for identity interviews, DNA provision or supplying additional supporting documentation)
- if the customer will be able to receive their supporting documentation when we complete the application

- if core documents will be available (for example, children born during a crisis who are evacuated without being issued birth certificates or will the issuing authority be able to re-issue documents during crisis situations)
- where the customer can apply from (for example, is it safe to apply from their country or residence or have they been evacuated or moved)

We will work with customers, the Foreign Office and other UK government departments (such as the General Register Office) to confirm:

- what documents are available
- what checks can take place locally
- if a customer needs an Emergency Travel Document (ETD)

You must apply discretion regarding any lack of documents on a case by case basis and only when using discretion has been agreed in the crisis specific guidance issued at the time. You must refer any exceptions or questions about documents to Guidance & Quality (G&Q) who will communicate with the Home Office Policy to resolve any issues.

Working with the FCDO will allow us to know of any plans for moving people to place of safety or about any methods to safely submit and return applications, passports and supporting documentation.

Responsibility for undocumented individuals (claim in doubt)

In responding to any query about confirming a claim to British nationality during a crisis, it's important to understand that any person who is not confirmed as British and is moved to a third country because of UK government assistance activity, will either need to be documented or moved to the UK or a UK territory (they become the responsibility of the UK government).

Therefore, you must be careful when making decisions that may lead to moving someone to a third country, if their claim is in doubt.

If you cannot confirm the customer as British, you must contact FCDO and UK Visas & Immigration (UKV&I) [crisis teams](#) to inform and seek advice about the next steps.

Whenever possible, we must advise the customer that their claims must be considered in the country where they make the application. It is the customer's responsibility to travel to where services can be provided.

Loss of contact and keeping documentation

HM Passport Office staff must apply sensitivity and common sense regarding applications from (or connected to) countries where there are crisis events and there has been no contact.

Customers caught up in a crisis situation may be unable to contact us and you must consider that before you withdraw an application because of loss of contact.

You must also consider if we should keep the customer's documentation for an extended period of time until the crisis is over to allow the customer to respond and reapply. Crisis specific guidance issued at the time will detail any specific instructions regarding document retention.

You must also consider whether any application withdrawn due to loss of contact during a crisis event will be processed free of charge when the customer reapplies. Crisis specific guidance will explain the discretion you must apply.

Getting passports to our customers

In crisis specific situations, we may not be able to deliver travel documents to the country or area, the customer's home address or local Visa Application Centre (VAC) because of the crisis (for example, power, communication and internet access may be unavailable). Customers may also not have access to funds or be able to attend or use any local services in the country due to the crisis.

We may need to get travel documents to our customers quickly and will consider sending passports to an address that is not the customer's known address (for example, using a third party address). We may also use alternative methods of getting passports to our customers such as arranging collection through a central point.

These methods may have risks associated, for example the risk of the document being lost, and we will only follow them if we are satisfied that customers will receive their passports safely and we have authorisation from the correct UK government department or assurance from a foreign government the customer will receive their documents.

We will give staff crisis specific guidance about passport deliveries at the time of the crisis.

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Waiving a fee

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about fee waivers during a crisis event.

During a crisis situation, HM Passport Office may waive the need for payment. It is important to note that, in most cases, a fee waiver will not be appropriate.

We may, on a case by case basis, consider waiving a fee for an application that has been withdrawn through [lack of contact](#) because of a crisis situation.

The threshold for a fee waiver is detailed in [Passport \(Fees\) Legislation 2018](#). It confirms that HM Passport Office will let customers know about any waiver schemes and will publish guidance on fees on [GOV.UK](#).

What a fee waiver is

When we offer a fee waiver, we are stating that we do not need the total fee for the service provided, for example we may decide to waive the:

- standard application fee
- premium service fee
- secure delivery fee

We will issue guidance about which part of the fee is waived. If the customer requests any additional services outside of the fee waived, they will need to pay for these.

When to consider a waiver

There are a number of factors HM Passport Office must consider when deciding to waive fees. Guidance will be provided for each situation, but examples may include:

- what types of other financial assistance have been provided to British nationals by the UK government
- what duties are being met by overseas governments for crisis events occurring in their own country
- if customers have already been given financial assistance for repatriation (support to allow them to return to the UK) or have had a fee waived for emergency travel documents
- if customers need a passport to remain in a safe haven or to return to a crisis impacted country, instead of returning to the UK
- if customers need a passport to re-establish their identity (to claim benefits or to avoid hardship)

The HM Passport Office director general (or their appointed deputy) will consider the circumstances and make the decision in consultation with the Passport Policy team.

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Emergency Travel Documents

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about other travel documents that can be issued during a crisis event.

In making recommendations to a customer about leaving a country affected by crisis, we can advise them the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) may provide a travel document to them, if:

- a passport is not available
- there is not enough time to issue a passport

The FCDO will tell HM Passport Office about decisions taken on Emergency Travel Documents (ETD) and any fees charged during a crisis situation. We can tell the customer if the FCDO has decided to give these travel documents free of charge and about any other fees the customer may claim back at a later date.

If the FCDO have published crisis specific guidance we must direct customers to this.

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Countries where the UK government may not be represented

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about what to do during a crisis situation when a customer is in a country where some services may not be available (because of political or civil instability in the region and concerns about staff and supplier safety).

There may be instances where HM Passport Office may get applications from customers in [countries where the UK is not represented](#) and unable to provide services, such as:

- DNA testing
- interviews
- delivery of new passports to customers

Customers in these countries may also need to hold on to their existing passports during the application process

If we receive an application during a crisis event from a customer in one of these countries, we may need to consider what:

- overseas risk level we need to apply to the application
- to tell the customer about travelling to attend an interview
- to tell the customer about the delivery address they need to provide

Our expectations of customers in this situation

It is the responsibility of the customer to meet our requirements with regard to attending interviews, providing additional evidence and the safe delivery of their passport.

We will expect the customer to travel (without the need for a British travel document) to a neighbouring country where the UK government is represented, if services are not available in the country they live in.

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