

Support for British nationals abroad: A guide



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Our Customer Charter

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

We will:

- > Be professional, non-judgemental, polite and helpful to you whatever your gender, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religion or belief.
- > Give clear information on how to contact us at our premises and online.
- > Tell you beforehand if there is a charge for a service we provide.
- > Deal with your enquiry accurately and efficiently, explaining clearly from the start what help we can give and when you should approach others for advice.
- > Keep waiting times to a minimum when you visit us and advise you of any delays.
- > Provide a private interview room if needed.
- > Protect any personal information you give us, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- > Use your feedback, comments and complaints to help us improve our services.

We will aim to:

- > Offer a fast response and consistent advice to your first-time telephone enquiries, worldwide and around the clock, with priority calls escalated for action.
- > Assess your needs promptly and provide effective assistance based on your individual circumstances and local conditions, contacting our most vulnerable customers within 24 hours of being notified of your situation¹.
- > Provide a rapid and high-quality response, with specially trained staff, if you are caught up in a crisis overseas, with consistent and regularly updated advice and assistance as the situation develops.
- > Meet our published targets for fee-bearing services, including issuing emergency travel documents on the same or next working day (on straightforward cases, once we receive your full and complete application at our Embassy, High Commission or Consulate).
- > Provide up-to-date and objective travel advice, offering a real-time response to your enquiries via social media (on weekdays from 9am-6pm and out-of-hours for urgent enquiries).

What we need from you:

- > Treat our staff with respect. If you are abusive, we may refuse to help you.
- > Be prepared to pay for some services e.g. an emergency travel document. We do not make a profit from these charges; they go towards the costs of providing consular services.
- > Provide us with feedback so that we can improve our services, (please see Tell us what you think at the end of this document).

...and please follow our tips below for travelling or living overseas:

- > Buy full travel and medical insurance to help cover any unexpected costs.
- > Have any necessary vaccinations, pack enough medication to cover any unforeseen extended stays or emergencies and leave your contact details and itinerary with family or friends.
- > Follow our travel advice (at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and local advice on what is safe and unsafe, respect local laws and take care of your money and passport (not forgetting to include your emergency contacts on the inside back cover).

Please note also that 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.

For more information on the services and support we provide, please speak to a member of staff or visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Note 1: We consider that someone is vulnerable when they cannot protect themselves from significant physical or emotional harm, or be protected by others. We will almost always treat many types of consular case (e.g. victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault and forced marriage, and cases involving children and young people) as vulnerable. In others, it will depend on the circumstances.

Contents

Summary	2	If something happens to a relative or partner	20
> Staying safe overseas		> Next of kin and representatives	
> Who we can help		> Death from natural causes	
> How we're funded		> Death in suspicious circumstances	
> What kind of help we can provide		> If they are arrested or in prison	
> Crisis response		> If they are missing	
> Our values		> If they are kidnapped or taken hostage	
> When our job is over		> If your child is taken abroad by their other parent without your permission	
> Important notes			
> Duty of care to our staff			
Who we can help	5	If you are affected by a crisis overseas	24
> What about dual nationals?		> What is a crisis?	
> Where you can find us		> Who we can help in a crisis	
> If something happens to you in a country where the UK is not represented		> What kind of help and assistance we can provide in a crisis	
Staying safe overseas	7	> Civil or political unrest	
> Before you go		> Events causing disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals	
> Special considerations		> Support after a crisis	
> When you are there		> Support for British nationals who are not ordinarily resident in the UK	
> If you are going to live abroad			
> Buying a property abroad		Tell us what you think	28
> If you are retiring overseas		Official complaints procedure	
> Some of the main things to consider when you arrive		Appendix	29
> What our Embassies can do		Categories of British nationals	
> In a crisis			
If something happens to you	14		
> If you have anything stolen			
> Travelling abroad when you don't have your passport			
> Financial help			
> Victims of crime			
> Victims of rape or sexual assault			
> Victims of torture and mistreatment			
> If you have to go into hospital			
> If you have a mental health problem			
> Forced marriage			
> If you are arrested or in prison			
> If you are subject to a travel ban			

Summary

This guide highlights some of the main things you can do to stay safe abroad and what help we can provide if you get into difficulty.

Staying safe overseas

- > Check our travel website on www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. Keep an eye on news reports of any problems in the area you are visiting. Follow [@FCOTravel](#) on **Facebook** and **Twitter** for regular updates from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). (See page 7)
 - > Before you travel, get comprehensive travel insurance, which includes any pre-existing medical conditions you have, and ensure it covers all activities you undertake. If you do not take out proper insurance, you will normally have to pay the costs of any emergency yourself, including expensive medical bills. Choosing to go to a country against our travel advice may seriously restrict any help we can provide and may also mean that your travel insurance is not valid. (See page 7)
 - > 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. However, be aware that some medications (including prescription medications) may be illegal in the country you are visiting. (See page 8).
 - > 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 8)
 - > 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 8)
 - > Take enough money for your trip and some backup funds, such as appropriate travellers' cheques, prepaid cash cards or credit cards. Before you leave, find out how you can replace your travellers' cheques and credit cards if you lose them, and keep a separate note of their numbers. (See page 9)
- > If you want to, you can give someone the power of attorney to look after your financial affairs in the UK, while you're away. You could also consider if you want to give someone the power to make decisions about your welfare or health care in case a situation arises where you are unable or incapable to make decisions for yourself. You can find more information at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney/overview.
 - > 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 9)

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 5)
- > British nationals with another nationality (known as 'dual nationals' – see page 5), although this will depend on the circumstances - normally we cannot help dual nationals when they are in the country of their other nationality.
- > Nationals of other European Union countries and the Commonwealth nationals whose country does not have a local embassy, but only in certain circumstances. (See page 5)

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

How we're funded

Consular assistance provided to British nationals overseas is not funded by the UK tax payer. It is funded by a small premium included in the price of every British passport. The remainder of our income comes from the fees we charge for documentary,

notarial and certain assistance services.

Fees are calculated based on the cost of our global consular operation so that every British national pays the same fee for the service they use no matter where they are in the world. The fees are approved by the Privy Council and laid before Parliament.

What kind of help we can provide

We offer help which is appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case. Our staff overseas will make an assessment of your vulnerability and the needs you have, based on who you are, where you are, and the situation you are facing. They will aim to offer assistance which helps meet these needs.

The help we offer can include:

- > Issuing replacement emergency travel documents.
- > Providing information about transferring funds.
- > Providing appropriate help if you have suffered rape and sexual or physical assault, are a victim of other crimes, are ill or in hospital.
- > Providing details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors and funeral directors.
- > Providing details of other organisations that can provide specialist support where we are unable to.
- > Contacting family or friends for you if you would like us to.
- > Making special arrangements in cases of terrorism, civil unrest or natural disasters.
- > Providing documentary services such as consular birth or death registration, help with marriage or civil partnership documents, or providing notarial services as appropriate.

We cannot:

- > Help you enter a country, for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid **because** each country can decide who they allow into their country, and no country outside the EU has any obligation to explain their decisions to the British Government.
- > Issue you with a new or replacement passport, or accept applications for these **because** passports are issued by Her Majesty's Passport Office in the UK.

- > Ensure your safety and security in another country **because** this is the responsibility of the government and authorities of that country.
- > Give you legal advice or translate formal documents **because** such support is best provided by independent professionals and we do not have the funding or the expertise to provide such specialist services.
- > Carry out searches for missing people **because** doing so is the responsibility of the local authorities and to search effectively requires resources that only local authorities can provide.
- > Investigate crimes, get you out of prison, prevent the local authorities from deporting you after your prison sentence, or interfere in criminal or civil court proceedings **because** we cannot interfere in another country's processes and must respect their systems, just as we expect them to respect the UK's laws and legal processes.
- > Get you better treatment in prison than local prisoners (although we may raise concerns with local authorities if treatment falls below internationally recognised standards) or get you better treatment in hospital than the treatment that is given to local people **because** we cannot interfere in another country's processes just as we would not accept such interference in the UK.
- > Pay any bills or give you money from public funds **because** we are not funded to do this and it is the obligation of individuals to take responsibility for themselves. It would also be unfair for those who take out insurance to subsidise those who do not, and you would not normally get these bills paid if you were in the UK.
- > Make travel arrangements for you, or find you work or accommodation, or make business arrangements on your behalf **because** these are private arrangements which are your responsibility to make for yourself.
- > Get involved (including offering advice) in private disputes over property, employment, commercial or other matters **because** we are in no position to judge the facts and have no jurisdiction overseas to resolve such matters.

Crisis response

Some crises involving British nationals abroad may need exceptional levels of response beyond what we describe on pages 14-23 of this guide. It is not easy to define in advance what these circumstances might be, but they could be the result of natural disasters or large-scale accidents, civil unrest, terrorism or conflict.

Some examples of the extra help we can provide in a crisis are to:

- > Send extra staff to the country involved to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground.
- > Work with local authorities to establish if British nationals have been involved and provide information and support to those who have been affected.
- > Set up an information hotline, SMS facility and online webform for people to contact us if British nationals require assistance.

Our values

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

When our job is over

We offer support to British nationals in difficulty abroad and to their families (either in the UK or elsewhere) to help them deal with the immediate effects of what has happened. In certain exceptional cases, our officers may be involved in a particular case for a longer period of time. For example, if a British national dies in suspicious circumstances, we will try to provide their family with the information local investigating authorities give us if we are permitted to share it. But sometimes people need long-term help in areas where our staff are not trained professionals, such as support from bereavement counsellors or investigative officers. Although we cannot provide this help ourselves, we can suggest where you can go for guidance. This may mean going to another UK government department or 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 work undertaken by other government agencies, such as issuing passports (Her Majesty's Passport Office) or visas (UK Border Agency).

We provide the support described in this guide in over 180 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 our assessment of how vulnerable you are, may all define 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, or where we provide extra help when the Foreign Secretary has agreed to our doing so. And, like any government department, we have a responsibility to use public funds efficiently and effectively.

Generally, there is no legal right to consular assistance. All assistance provided is at our discretion.

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 but please remember that they 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, they may refuse to help you.

If you are not happy with the support we have provided, you can make a complaint (see page 28).

Who we can help

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

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

- > A British citizen
- > A British Overseas Territories citizen²
- > A British overseas citizen
- > A British national (overseas)³
- > A British subject
- > A British protected person

See the appendix for definitions of all these categories. We cannot help non-British nationals, irrespective of how long they have lived in the UK or their connections to the UK. We may help nationals of other European Union Member States 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, but will normally ask their nearest embassy to provide any ongoing assistance required.

What about dual nationals?

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

Note 2:

We provide the same help to British Overseas Territories citizens living or travelling outside the Overseas Territory as we do to any other British national in difficulty

Note 3:

We cannot help British nationals (overseas) of Chinese ethnic origin in China, Hong Kong and the Macao Special Administrative Regions. The Chinese authorities consider British nationals (overseas) of Chinese ethnic origin as Chinese nationals, and we have no power to get involved in mainland China. However, we can help British nationals (overseas) living or travelling outside China, Hong Kong and Macao

connected with. Becoming a British national may not mean you lose your original nationality.

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

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

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

Where you can find us

Support is provided by Consular staff at 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 are usually British High Commissions or Deputy High Commissions in Commonwealth countries, and British Embassies in other countries. Consular staff sometimes also work in separate buildings called Consulates General or Consulates.

In some places where there are no British diplomatic or consular missions, we have networks of Honorary Consuls, who work on a voluntary basis and 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. There is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates at <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations>.

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

If you need consular assistance in one of the few countries where there is no British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate, you are entitled to ask for help from the Embassy or Consulate of any other European Union Member State. There are also informal arrangements with some other countries, including New Zealand and Australia, to help British nationals in some countries.

If other countries provide help on our behalf, you should receive the same level of help as they would give to their own nationals.

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

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

Staying safe overseas

British nationals take millions of trips overseas every year and most of these pass without any kind of incident. Many British people live overseas without experiencing any difficulties. However, it is important to remember that outside the UK:

- > You are less likely to be familiar with local conditions and the legal framework. There may be language barriers.
- > You may be more exposed to a wide variety of risks and threats, such as crime and fraud.
- > 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

- > Our travel advice provides information and advice to help British nationals make informed decisions about their safety abroad (see www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice). This includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-western or British demonstrations, lawlessness, violence, natural disasters, epidemics, and aircraft and shipping safety. We review the information in our travel advice regularly and update it following any significant incident that might affect British nationals visiting or living in the area. In a developing crisis we update the information much more regularly and, if necessary, several times a day⁴. We will also publish information on [facebook.com/fcotravel](https://www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and twitter.com/fcotravel.

Note 4:

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

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 Area⁵ or Switzerland should also get a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which entitles you to cheaper or free emergency care. However, you will still need travel insurance. You can apply for an EHIC at post offices, by phone on 0845 606 2030, or online at www.ehic.org.uk⁶. If you are going to live abroad, find out whether the UK has a social security agreement with the country where you plan to live and what services are covered. For more information, check the Department for Work and Pensions' website www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions. Unless your employer provides a healthcare plan, you should consider private healthcare plans to cover treatment in the country where you live. See www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-insurance for more information about travel insurance.

Note 5:

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

Note 6:

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

- > Make sure that your insurance is up to date and valid for the entire trip and that it covers everything and everyone who is travelling. Check exactly what is covered – for example, personal injury as a result of terrorist activity, natural disasters, all the activities you want to do (including any dangerous sports), all your luggage and equipment, medical and legal costs. You should also look carefully at exemptions to the insurance policy, including any relating to pre-existing medical conditions, or alcohol and drugs. Some policies do not cover personal injury as a result of terrorist activity or loss in the event of a natural disaster. Be sure to tell your insurer about any pre-existing medical conditions you may have, including any psychiatric illness. The policy may not be valid if you fail to do this, which could mean that you or your family and friends have to pay for any 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health, www.nathnac.org/travel and www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk for more information. Pack enough supplies of any medication that you are taking in your hand luggage. You should keep your medication in its original packaging and take any prescription documents with you. In some countries, medicine that you were given over the counter elsewhere may be illegal. Check with the nearest embassy of the country you are going to (which may be based in London or another European city) that your medication will be legal in that country and find out whether you will need to take a doctor's letter with you. For longer trips, visit your dentist and optician before travelling.
- > At the back of your passport, fill in the contact details of two relatives or friends who can be contacted in an emergency. Apart from your passport, take another form of identification with you (preferably one with a photograph, such as a driving licence).
- > Whether you are travelling or living overseas, you should have the details of your nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate with you. In the event of a crisis in which British nationals may be involved, we provide advice and travel updates on www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > Make sure you are aware of the immigration and customs controls of the country you are travelling to, including any necessary visas. For some countries, your passport needs to be valid for at least six months after the date you travel. You should contact the embassy or consulate of the country to which you are travelling for information about the immigration requirements of that country. It is your responsibility to make sure you have the correct visa for your stay in another country. If you are experiencing difficulties entering a country (for example, if you do not have a visa or your passport is not valid), consular staff will not be able to help you enter the country. They cannot get involved in another country's immigration policy or procedures. See www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports or call the UK Passport Adviceline on 0300 222 0000 for information about how to get a passport.
- > Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back. Leave an itinerary and details of where you might be 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.
- > Take enough money for your trip and some back-up funds, such as travellers' cheques (if appropriate), cash or credit cards. Before you leave, check that your cards are valid, and find out how you can replace them and your travellers' cheques if they are lost or stolen. Keep a separate note of their numbers and of the number you would need to ring to stop any credit cards if they are lost or stolen. If you want to, you can give someone the power of attorney to look after your financial affairs in the UK, while you're away.
- > Buy a good travel guide that includes basic information on local laws and customs. Talk to your travel agent or tour operator about possible risks.

- > If you are planning to drive, make sure your UK driving licence is current and valid. Make sure you know the driving laws, licence requirements and driving conditions in the country you are visiting. In some countries you will need to have an international driving permit as well as your UK licence. Never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs and be aware that other countries will have different laws relating to the amount of alcohol that you can legally consume. Be aware that in many countries there are on-the-spot fines for traffic offences. For more details, see the 'Driving abroad' page on our website at www.gov.uk/driving-abroad.

Special considerations

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 mental health needs
- > Travellers with physical health needs
- > Travellers with disabilities

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

When you are there

- > Be aware of security and take sensible precautions. Leave your valuables at home if you can. Only carry as much money as you need for the day. Leave the rest, and at least one credit card, in the hotel safe if one is available. Keep copies of your passport, insurance details and other important

travel documents separate from the originals. It is useful to always have some form of identity on you, such as a driving licence or a photocopy of your passport (in some countries you may need to keep your passport with you). Stay aware of what is going on around you and keep away from situations where you do not feel comfortable. Find out from your guidebook or tour guide about any local scams. Keep up to date with local and regional events in the media. Don't take risks on holiday that you wouldn't take at home. If a situation looks dangerous, it probably is.

- > Keep a note of the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate phone number (see www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice for details about the country you are visiting). When you arrive, find out how to get in touch with the local emergency services in case you need them during your stay.
- > A passport is a valuable document, and you are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to protect it. You may face delays or difficulties at immigration if you return to the UK without a passport, and should not try to travel on a driving licence or a local police report. While we can usually issue replacement emergency travel documents overseas for a fee (see page 14), 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 travel document and in others we may refuse to issue one once we have considered your application. We will explain this to you in full at the time of application.
- > Stay in regular touch with your family and friends in the UK, especially if you are travelling alone or in a remote area, or if you are aware of a terrorist attack or other crisis in the region in which you are travelling. Although you may feel perfectly safe, people at home may worry if they don't hear from you, and could report you missing. If you take your mobile phone abroad, make sure you have international roaming (the facility to use your phone on a foreign network), and an adaptor so that you can recharge your battery.
- > There may be very serious penalties for breaking a local law which might seem trivial to you or for doing something which may not be illegal in

the UK. And something that you do abroad (e.g. bribing a local official) might render you liable for prosecution in the UK. It is an offence for a British national or someone who is ordinarily resident in the UK, to pay a bribe anywhere in the world. This includes people travelling for work, business or pleasure. If we have reason to believe a bribe has been paid by a person or company with a close connection to the UK then we may be required to notify the Serious Fraud Office.

- > Do not overstay your visa or work illegally – you may be fined or sent to prison.
 - > Hobbies that involve using cameras and binoculars, such as bird watching or plane spotting, may be misunderstood (particularly near military sites). Filming or photographing demonstrations may also be seen as provocative in some countries. If in doubt, don't do it.
 - > Respect local customs and behave and dress appropriately, particularly when visiting religious sites, markets and rural communities. Travel guidebooks, tour operators and hotel staff are all useful sources of information. If in doubt, take extra care. In some places, behaviour that would be acceptable elsewhere can lead to serious trouble. In some countries, it can also be worth asking for permission before taking any photographs so as not to cause offence.
 - > Help protect local wildlife and habitats by respecting rules and regulations (including how to dispose of rubbish properly). Be aware that buying any wildlife products is risky. Customs departments throughout the world confiscate illegal souvenirs, and in the UK you could face a criminal prosecution and fines.
 - > Check that what you are bringing back to the UK is legal. You can get more information about bringing back meat, animal products or plants from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs) or call them on 08459 335577 (+44 (0) 207 238 6951 from outside the UK). You can get information about banned and restricted goods, and your customs allowances, from HM Revenue & Customs (see www.hmrc.gov.uk or call 0845 010 9000).
- > Be aware of local attitudes to alcohol and know your own limit. Keep your drinks with you at all times as they could be spiked with drugs to make you more vulnerable to assault or rape. Be aware that accidents are more likely to happen after drinking alcohol or taking drugs. In such cases avoid swimming and take particular care on balconies or other high places. If you have an accident or injure yourself while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it is unlikely that your insurance policy will cover you.
 - > Be aware of what may happen if you become involved with drugs overseas. Not only are there health risks, but there may also be severe penalties for any association with drugs. Pack your own baggage, fasten it securely and do not leave it unattended. Never carry packages through customs for other people and be cautious about accepting gifts. Take sensible precautions when crossing borders and customs points in someone else's vehicle. If in doubt get out and make your own way through. You should not lend your vehicle to other people.
 - > Follow health advice (as mentioned on page 8). You should, for example, drink plenty of safe drinking water, use sunscreen, and take care what you eat and where you eat it.
 - > Think about what a deterioration in your health overseas would mean. Are the services in the country you are visiting worse, better or the same as the UK?
 - > Our lists of local lawyers, translators/interpreters, doctors and funeral directors are available on British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate pages on gov.uk. We aim to check the accuracy of these lists at least once a year.

If you are going to live abroad

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

Some of the main things to consider before you go

- > Check relevant websites for information, for example, our website (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and the website of the embassy in the UK of the country concerned.
- > Find out about the healthcare system, including costs, and get a full health plan. Many countries do not provide government-funded healthcare and your eligibility for treatment under the NHS may change. However, you might be entitled to healthcare paid by the UK, but this will depend on whether you live abroad permanently, or only work outside the UK for a set period and whether or not you receive a UK state pension or other UK benefits. For further information see the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/movingabroad/Pages/Introduction.aspx).
- > Consider taking out health insurance to cover private medical and dental treatment, as well as the costs of being brought back to the UK for medical treatment. Travel insurance will, in many cases, not provide enough cover if you plan to live overseas and may be invalid if you move abroad permanently.
- > Find out about welfare rights abroad. Some UK benefits are not paid outside the UK. Others apply only in countries which have agreements with the UK (for more details, see www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health). 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.
- > Remember that British nationals generally must have lived in the UK for five years to be entitled to income-related UK benefits. This may affect you if you have to return to the UK for any reason. You can find more information about the 'habitual residency test' on the Department for Work and Pensions' website or the Citizens Advice website (www.citizensadvice.org.uk).
- > Be clear about your financial situation and allow for changes to the exchange rate and inflation. Find out about tax liability in the UK, social security benefits and National Insurance contributions, and get a State Pension forecast. Useful websites include www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions and www.hmrc.gov.uk. You should also make a will. Remember that you may need a will for any property or possessions in the UK and a separate will for any property and possessions you hold abroad. You could also consider if you want to give someone the power to make decisions about your welfare or health care in case a situation arises where you are unable or incapable to make decisions for yourself. You can find more information at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney/overview.
- > Make sure that your car complies with local regulations and that you have the necessary driving permit. We cannot help you export or import your car or personal belongings.
- > Learning the language can make daily life much easier.
- > Research schools and education opportunities. Contact the country's local education authorities to find out about the education system.
- > Check whether you can continue to vote in UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections. See www.aboutmyvote.co.uk for details.
- > It is important you have a valid passport (fill in the details of two relatives or friends on the back page) and any necessary visas.

Buying a property abroad

- > If you are thinking of buying a property abroad – buy with CARE: go into it with Caution, make sure you seek Advice – local laws can be complex and unclear; do your own Research and then Evaluate on the basis of that before you proceed.
- > Use an independent English-speaking lawyer who is licensed to practice and is experienced in property sales and avoid using anyone recommended by the agent, vendor or developer. We cannot give you legal advice or get involved in purchases or disputes. A list of English-speaking lawyers is on each British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate page on the gov.uk website. If required, you should also engage an independent translator or interpreter.

- > You should deal only with established and reputable estate agents or with other contacts that you know to be reliable and genuine. You should make all payments within bank premises and/or through banking channels.
- > Timeshare ownership is well established in many countries, with respected companies, agents and resorts operating legally and fairly. However, you should beware of timeshare companies offering incentives (including stock market investments and discounts on airfares and accommodation) when exchanging existing time-share ownership or taking out membership of holiday clubs. If you are approached by agents operating such schemes, treat them with caution.
- > Check out the property guidance on the gov.uk website. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and Association of International Property Professionals are useful contacts for people looking to buy a property overseas.

If you are retiring overseas

- > Contact associations or charities for advice. Age UK (www.ageuk.org.uk) and www.gov.uk have advice on planning and preparing for your move abroad, as well as what to do and who to contact if things don't go according to plan. Organisations such as Saga (www.saga.co.uk) can provide information on what it's like to live overseas.
- > Get independent tax advice about the implications of living overseas.
- > Make plans for any deterioration of your health. Find out what support you will and will not be entitled to.
- > Consider what will happen if you were to lose capacity to make certain decisions while abroad.

Some of the main things to consider when you arrive

- > Register with the local authorities. This may give you access to the local welfare services. In some countries you may need to apply for a residence permit within a set period soon after you arrive.
- > Give your friends and family, and authorities such as HM Revenue & Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions, your new address and tell them if it changes in the future.

- > Open a foreign bank account. If you are retiring, your pensions can be paid into your bank account direct in many countries.
- > Contact British associations, clubs and charities, as these can help you settle. Lists are usually available from the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in your area.
- > More information on moving or retiring abroad can be found on www.gov.uk/moving-or-retiring-abroad.

What our Embassies can do

There is information on all our British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate pages on gov.uk about living in that country. But remember: our Embassies can only do so much. It's your responsibility to find a place to live, support yourself financially and find a school for your children. You can subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts, to receive real-time travel advice updates.

> Notarial services

A number of our posts (but not posts in Commonwealth countries) are able to offer a limited number of notarial services.

For more information about these services and related charges consult the Embassy and Consulate websites at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice, or contact the Embassy or Consulate directly.

> Marriage, civil partnership, birth and death

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

Remember that you should 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.

In a crisis

We may offer additional help in a crisis (see page 24-27), but please remember the following:

- > Whether you are travelling or living overseas, you should have the details of your nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate with you. In the event of any crisis, we provide advice and travel updates on **www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice** as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > We recommend you subscribe to email travel advice alerts at **public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new** and follow our travel advice pages on social media (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and (www.twitter.com/fcotravel). Travel advice updates will include the most up-to-date information for British nationals. Please follow the guidance in these updates.
- > It may take some time to get help to you if infrastructure has been affected by a crisis (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.
- > Please ensure family and friends have your contact details and details of your whereabouts so they can give us this information if you are in an area affected by a crisis overseas.

If something happens to you

This section describes the range of support and information we can normally offer if things go wrong. If you are caught up in a crisis, a different level of support may be available – for more details, see pages 24-27.

If you have anything stolen

- > If your money, passport or anything else is stolen abroad, report it to the local police immediately and get a statement about the loss (you will need one to claim against your insurance).
- > You will need to cancel any credit cards or travellers' cheques. You may also want to ask your bank or a relative to send money to you using a reliable money transfer company. Our staff can give you information about this if you need it.
- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, you should also report it immediately to Her Majesty's Passport Office at www.gov.uk/report-a-lost-or-stolen-passport.

Travelling abroad when you don't have your passport

- > If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, or you do not have it with you for another reason, and you urgently need to travel, we may be able to issue a replacement emergency travel document. We will only do this once we are satisfied of your identity and that you are a British national. You will need to show you are planning to travel, produce a police report (if your passport has been stolen), fill in an application form and pay a fee.
- > If you have never had a passport before, in most circumstances you will not be able to apply for an emergency travel document. You will need to apply to Her Majesty's Passport Office for a full validity passport.
- > A replacement emergency travel document may take time and could mean you have to delay your travel arrangements. You should make sure that your travel insurance covers you if this happens.

- > Out of hours, we will normally only issue a replacement emergency travel document in a genuine emergency, where not to do so would cause genuine hardship. Inconvenience or a small financial loss are not reasons for issuing an emergency travel document out of hours. We will in most cases charge an out of hours call out fee.
- > Some countries do not accept emergency travel documents and others (including the USA), may require you to apply for a visa. Where we can we will advise you of any known restrictions but our advice does not guarantee your admission. If you are unsure about the entry requirements for countries you plan to visit or pass through you should check with the relevant Embassy or High Commission and/or the immigration authorities of the country concerned.
- > Before you contact us, consider whether you will also need an exit visa from the local immigration authorities. Some countries do not issue these visas outside normal office hours.

Financial help

- > If you run out of money abroad, we can give you information on how to transfer money and we can help you to contact relatives and friends who may be willing to transfer money to you or to buy you a travel ticket to get you home. If we transfer money on your behalf, we will charge you for this.
- > We cannot provide money to family or friends to help with their travel or accommodation if they visit you, for example if you have had to go into hospital.
- > We are not funded to provide financial assistance and we cannot pay your bills. It is important that you have full travel insurance - if you don't, you will be liable for any costs you are charged.
- > We may be able to provide an emergency loan from public funds to help you return home, but

this is discretionary and will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances, and only if you have completely used up all other methods of getting funds. If you are eligible, you will have to sign an 'undertaking to repay' agreement, where you agree to repay the loan. In most cases, you will have to secure this loan by giving up your passport to our staff, who will then issue you with an emergency travel document valid for a single journey to your country of residence. The cost of this document will be added to the loan. We will not return your passport to you, and Her Majesty's Passport Office will not issue you with a replacement passport, until you have repaid the loan in full. If you do not repay the loan within 6 months, it will be subject to a surcharge of 10%.

- > It is up to us to decide whether we grant these loans – a lack of other ways for you to return home does not mean that we will automatically agree to it.

Victims of crime overseas

- > We can give general information about local police and legal procedures. We cannot give you legal advice, but we can suggest where to get it.
- > If you need medical treatment, we can help you to contact a local doctor.
- > If you want us to, we can contact your relatives and friends and let them know if something has happened to you.
- > We can only offer you financial help in line with our policy set out in the 'Financial help' section of this guide.
- > We cannot collect evidence or investigate crimes ourselves. In many countries investigating authorities and the courts may refuse to answer enquiries from other people and organisations, including consular staff. You should consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court, and follow any trial for you. We can give you a list of local English-speaking lawyers and interpreters.
- > We would not normally attend a court case involving a British national unless you are particularly vulnerable, and we cannot influence the outcome of any trial.
- > Back in the UK, you may feel you would benefit from extra support to help you cope with the effects of the crime. Organisations such as Victim Support may 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 that country with the help of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (see www.gov.uk/government/organisations/criminal-injuries-compensation-authority or call 0300 003 3601).
- > We have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad', which offers more detailed information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-of-crime.

Victims of rape or sexual assault overseas

- > We take any report of rape and sexual assault seriously and will try to see you to offer you support as soon as possible and in private. We aim to be polite, patient, sensitive and non-judgmental.
- > Many victims of rape and sexual assault, regardless of their gender, prefer to talk about their ordeal with women. If that is what you want, we will do our best to make sure that a female consular official is present at any meeting.
- > We can tell you about local police and legal procedures. If you want to contact the police, we can come to the police station with you. If possible, we can ask that you are interviewed by a female police officer if that is what you would prefer, and one is available. If you want us to, we can give you a list of local lawyers and interpreters. However, only you can decide whether or not to report the crime to the police or take legal action – we cannot make this decision for you. Remember that if you choose not to report the crime immediately but change your mind later, forensic and other evidence may be lost. Also, in some countries, you must report the crime before returning to the UK if you want it to be investigated.
- > We can help you to deal with the local authorities to arrange a medical examination by a female doctor, if possible and if that is what you would prefer. Depending on local conditions and laws,

we can also arrange for you to see a doctor who can give advice on sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, and on pregnancy or abortion.

- > If you want us to, we can contact your family or friends.
- > We can give you information on what professional help is available locally and in the UK, both for you and for your family. 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 at www.gov.uk/government/publications/rape-and-sexual-assault-abroad.

Victims of Torture and Mistreatment

- > We take all allegations or concerns of torture and mistreatment very seriously and will follow up with action, as appropriate.
- > When considering how to act, we will avoid any action that might put you or any other person that may be affected at risk.
- > If you have been tortured or subjected to other mistreatment, we can put you or your family in touch with organisations that can assist, in particular REDRESS, a UK charity which assists torture survivors obtain justice and reparation (www.redress.org).

British nationals who go into hospital overseas

- > We aim to contact you as soon as possible after being told that you have been admitted to hospital to assess how we can help you. We will then aim to provide assistance according to your individual needs. This may include visiting you if you are particularly vulnerable.
- > When we assess your vulnerability, we will take account of factors such as your condition, your ability to speak on the phone, whether you have relatives or friends with you, whether you have a tour company representative and the standard of medical facilities before deciding whether a visit is appropriate. If we believe it is, and there is a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate in the

same city as the hospital you are in, we will aim to visit you as soon as possible.

- > If you want, we can contact your family or friends in the UK to tell them that you are in hospital.
- > If you want, we can help you to consult your insurance company or medical evacuation company. Remember to keep any receipts or doctors' notes in case you need them to make a claim. We may also be able to help you communicate with hospital staff in certain situations if they do not speak English.
- > We do not usually contact or visit people who have travelled specifically for medical treatment.
- > If you are travelling within the European Economic Area⁷ 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 Health

- > Facilities and resources available to those experiencing mental health issues, as well as the understanding of these issues, vary in different countries.
- > Where appropriate, we will do our best to help you find support and advice wherever you are.
- > If you need medication, we can provide information on prescribing and dispensing doctors or chemists. We are unable to provide and pay for specialist mental health help, advice or medical supplies.
- > If you want, we can contact your family and friends in the UK.
- > If you need hospital treatment overseas for a mental health issue and receive treatment in the UK, we will try to help overseas and UK medical staff to contact each other. Our aim is for relevant information to be shared between those treating you, so that you can receive ongoing support if you return to the UK.

Note 7:

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

- > Having travel insurance can be very helpful in providing payment for medical treatment. However, there are occasions where it becomes invalid - for instance, if a pre-existing condition is not declared or if the policy does not cover mental health needs. In these cases, you or your family must pay for any treatment.
- > If you plan to return to the UK we can offer information to help you make an informed decision about this.
- > We have a leaflet called 'No Health Without Mental Health' with more information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health.

Forced marriage of a British national abroad

- > In a forced marriage a person is coerced into marrying someone against his or her will. They may be physically threatened or emotionally blackmailed to do so. It is an abuse of human rights and cannot be justified on any religious or cultural basis.
- > If you are a British national in the UK and are worried about being forced into a marriage abroad, you should contact our Forced Marriage Unit by e-mail to fmu@fco.gov.uk or by phone on 020 7008 0151 from 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Outside office hours, if your query is urgent, you can obtain advice by phoning our switchboard on 020 7008 1500 and asking for the Global Response Centre. It is essential that you think carefully before deciding whether to travel to the country concerned. For more information see www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage.
- > If you are overseas and fear that you are going to be forced into a marriage you should try to contact, or preferably go to, the nearest British Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate. You will find contact details in local phone books, hotels and tourist offices, and there is a directory of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates at <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations>. If you cannot get there, depending on your location, we may still be able to try to help you, within the limits of local law.

- > We can try to help you return to the UK, if that is what you want. If possible, we may also try to find you temporary accommodation in the country you are in.
- > If you have been forced into a marriage and are being forced to sponsor a visa, we may be able to help you. Call us on 020 7008 0151.
- > We have a leaflet called 'What is a forced marriage?' with more information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/forced-marriage.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

- > If you are arrested or held in custody or prison overseas, the authorities in that country should ask you whether you want them to contact the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. However, you can also ask for this to be done, and should do so particularly if you are charged with a serious offence.
- > We will aim to contact you as soon as possible after being told about your arrest or detention so that we can assess how we can help you but how soon this is may depend on local procedures. We will then aim to provide assistance according to your individual circumstances and local conditions
- > We can put you in touch with Prisoners Abroad, a UK charity which supports British citizens detained overseas and their families (www.prisonersabroad.org.uk).
- > Our staff are there to support you and to take an interest in your welfare. We aim to be sensitive and non-judgmental. 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.
- > If you want us to, we can tell your family or friends that you have been arrested. If you are thinking about not telling your family, please consider the distress it may cause them if they are not told where you are. It can also be a disadvantage to you if you need money for anything in prison or fall ill. Once we have told your family and friends, we will keep them updated on your well-being.
- > If the prison has no postal service, we can deliver letters from your family and friends to the prison, but

we cannot deliver letters directly to you or pass letters from you to them unless the prison permits it.

- > Although we cannot give legal advice, start legal proceedings or investigate a crime, we can offer basic information about the local legal system, including whether a legal aid scheme is available. We can give you a list of local interpreters and local lawyers 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. In no circumstances can we pay your legal costs.
- > We can offer you information about the local prison or remand system, including visiting arrangements, mail and censorship, privileges, work possibilities, and social and welfare services. We can also explain where there are different regulations for remand prisoners and sentenced prisoners. For example, in some countries, prisoners are allowed to send more mail when they are on remand.
- > We cannot get you out of prison or detention, nor can we get special treatment for you because you are British. If however you are not treated in line with internationally-accepted standards we will consider approaching local authorities. This may include if your trial does not follow internationally-recognised standards for a fair trial or is unreasonably delayed compared to local cases.
- > We can also help to put you in touch with the charity Fair Trials International (www.fairtrials.net).
- > With your permission, we can consider taking up a complaint about ill treatment, personal safety, or discrimination with the police or prison authorities. Again, with your permission, we can make sure that any medical or dental problems you might have are brought to the attention of any police or prison doctor.
- > Consular staff will keep in regular contact with you, either by visiting personally or by telephone/letter. The frequency of visits will depend on local prison conditions and your personal circumstances.
- > Within certain limits, we can send you money from your family. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service. In some countries, depending on the rules of the prison where you are being held,

we can help to buy essential items with money sent by your family, friends or other people.

- > We may be able to give you information about any local procedures for a prisoner's early release in exceptional circumstances. These procedures are generally known as pardon or clemency. We will only consider supporting pardon or clemency pleas:
 - in compelling compassionate circumstances, such as where a prisoner or close family member is chronically ill or dying and this would leave no-one to care for dependants;
 - in cases of children and young people imprisoned overseas;
 - as a last resort, in cases where we have evidence that seems to point to a miscarriage of justice.
- > We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. If you are facing a charge that carries the death penalty, or if you have been sentenced to death, we will normally raise your case at whatever stage and level we judge to be appropriate. We can also put you in touch with The Death Penalty Project (www.deathpenaltyproject.org) who provide free legal assistance and advice to British nationals facing the death penalty, and Reprieve (www.reprieve.org.uk), who work to prevent the execution of any British national detained overseas.
- > We can explain to you how you may be able to apply to transfer to a prison in the UK if you are in a country from which prison transfers are possible. We have a leaflet called '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 doing this, even if you previously lived in the country before your prison sentence.
- > You should be aware that if you are arrested for certain serious offences, such as child sex abuse or drugs crimes, our staff must tell other relevant UK authorities⁸.

Note 8:

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

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

If you are subject to a travel ban

If you are subject to a travel ban, i.e. prevented from travelling or leaving the country for whatever reason, we may be able to offer assistance. For example, we can:

- provide you with a list of local lawyers;
- provide you with information about any organisations that may be able to help;
- contact family and friends in the UK on your behalf if you are unable to do so easily.

We may also consider approaching the local authorities, taking into account factors such as local law, the reason for the ban, and your personal circumstances.

If something happens to a relative or partner

This section explains what support we aim to offer the partners or relatives of a British national who dies or suffers some other serious misfortune abroad. There may be a different level of support if the person affected has been caught up in a crisis (see pages 24-27).

Next of kin and representatives

- > When we are told about an incident involving a British national abroad, we will try to contact the person's family as soon as possible.
 - > However, we cannot normally pass on information to relatives if the person involved asks us not to – for example, if they have been arrested but do not want their family to know about this.
 - > To help us provide information as efficiently and securely as possible, you should appoint a single family representative who we can deal with as the case continues. As far as possible, we will make sure that you have a single point of contact with a member of our staff.
 - > In cases of death abroad, we will normally deal only with next of kin or the person nominated to act on their behalf in relation to the funeral or dealing with the belongings of the person who has died.
 - > If there is an ongoing investigation overseas, we can ask a local UK police force to use a family liaison officer (FLO) to advise and help you to deal with the investigation. The relevant UK police force will make the final decision as to whether an FLO is appointed.
- > We will do everything we can to make sure that, as next of kin, you do not hear about the death first from the media, although we cannot always influence this. In exceptional circumstances, this may mean having to tell you about the death over the phone. We do not release the name of someone who has died to the media before we have told the next of kin.
 - > Consular staff in London can pass on your wishes about dealing with the body to our staff overseas. We will do our best to make sure that these wishes are carried out. However, post-mortem examinations may be carried out by the local authorities without your permission. In some countries, organs may be removed and kept during these procedures without your being informed or consulted.
 - > If you want us to, we can tell you the cost of local burial and local cremation (where local authorities allow these for foreigners) or of transporting the body and personal belongings back to the UK (known as 'repatriation'). You should be aware that, in some countries, a lack of suitable storage may make it impossible to get the necessary international certificates to transport the body. While we cannot pay any burial, cremation or repatriation expenses ourselves or settle any debts, we can help transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs. If you want us to, we can provide lists of local and international funeral directors.
 - > In the case of a crisis or terrorist attack, local practices overseas may change, and there may be delays with bodies being returned to the UK due to identification procedures.

Deaths abroad from natural causes

- > If the person who died was travelling with a tour company, the company will often contact you, as the next of kin, themselves. If the death of a British national abroad is reported to us, and you are not present, we will ask the UK police to tell you as soon as possible. If you are not in the UK, we will ask our consular staff in the country where you are to do this.

- > All deaths must be registered with the local authorities in the country where the person died. We can advise you how to do this. You will need documents about you and the person who has died, including, for example, the full name, date of birth and passport number of the person who has died. The local authorities will need to be told if the person suffered from an infectious condition, such as hepatitis or HIV, so they can take precautions against infection.
- > You do not have to register with the Embassy, High Commission or Consulate the death of a British national that occurs overseas. But you will need to obtain a local death certificate which can be used in the UK for most purposes including probate. If you want to apply for a Consular death registration you should check our services online at www.gov.uk/register-a-death. Note that we are not able to register the deaths of British citizens in certain countries.
- > In the UK there are a number of organisations that can support and help bereaved families and friends to understand their grief and come to terms with their loss. Useful websites include www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk and www.samaritans.org.
- > You can find further information at www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-death-abroad.

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.
- > A Coroner in England and Wales will normally hold an inquest if a person died a violent or unnatural death overseas and the body is returned to the Coroner's district. Different procedures for investigating deaths apply in each part of the UK.
- > We can 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. But in all cases where you 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 may 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.
- > You should be aware that the standard of investigative procedures and expertise varies greatly across the world, and we cannot interfere in another country's investigation or judicial processes. We will consider making appropriate representations to the local authorities if there are concerns that the investigation is not being carried out in line with local procedures; if there are justified complaints about discrimination against the person who has died or their family; or where we judge that a local delay or decision creates significant distress for the bereaved, ensuring that we do not interfere in the investigation or judicial processes in that country.
- > Consular staff in London are available to meet family representatives. They can contact you if the investigating authorities tell us about any new developments. Where possible, if you visit 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 you.
- > Where legal systems differ significantly from the UK, or proceedings are conducted in a language you do not understand, we may help to arrange, and attend, an initial round of meetings with the authorities. And we may accompany you to certain days of a trial and verdict where this is appropriate.
- > 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. Where the death was a result of murder or manslaughter (and local authorities are treating it as this), if you wish, we will put you in touch with Victim Support's National Homicide Service, who will allocate a named caseworker to give you free and confidential help.

- > You can find further information at www.gov.uk/government/publications/coping-with-death-abroad.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Victims of crime abroad', which offers more detailed information. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/victims-of-crime.

British nationals in detention or prison overseas

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

- > If your relative or friend has asked us to, we will tell you as soon as we can that they have been detained or held in prison. However, to protect their privacy, we will not normally provide any details of the detention or arrest, or tell you how to contact them, unless they have given us permission.
- > We can provide general information about the country involved, prison conditions and the local legal processes.
- > We can put you in touch with the prisoners' welfare charity, Prisoners Abroad (see www.prisonersabroad.org.uk or phone 020 7561 6820).
- > If the prison where your friend or relative is being detained agrees, we can, within certain limits, pass on any money you want to send to them to buy prison 'comforts', use the phone and so on. In some cases, there may be a charge for this service.
- > If the prison has no postal service, we can deliver letters from you to the prison, but we cannot deliver letters directly to a prisoner, or pass letters from them to you, unless the prison permits it.
- > You should be aware that, in many countries, mail the prisoner sends or receives will be opened and read by the authorities, and phone conversations may be monitored.

If they are missing

- > If you are in the UK and worried about a British national who you think is missing abroad, we can tell you how to make a missing persons report for your local police so that Interpol enquiries can begin.

- > Although we cannot carry out physical searches on your behalf, we can give you information about appropriate local authorities. We can also give you contact details for any relevant local charitable and voluntary organisations specialising in tracing missing people. 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.
- > We can put you in touch with Missing Abroad (www.missingabroad.org) who may offer further advice and help.
- > We have a leaflet called 'Missing persons abroad' which you may find helpful. You can find details on www.gov.uk/government/publications/missing-persons.

British nationals kidnapped or taken hostage overseas

- > If a British national is taken hostage overseas, we will try to do everything we properly can to make sure they are released safely. Where we can we, will work with the government in that country, who will normally take the lead in dealing with the situation.
- > We will not make substantive concessions to hostage takers. Substantive concessions would include paying a ransom, changing government policy or releasing prisoners.
- > A dedicated team in London will act as caseworkers for the family and will make sure that you are kept up to date with the situation as far as possible. In some cases, British police may appoint a family liaison officer. If this happens, our team will work closely with the local police force involved.
- > If appropriate, we can also put you in touch with other specialist agencies such as Hostage UK (www.hostageuk.org).

- > When a British hostage is released, we will meet them and help them make contact with you. If necessary, we can help arrange a medical check-up and travel to the UK.

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

- > If you are worried about your child being abducted overseas by their other parent or a relative, you should contact Consular Directorate on 020 7008 1500. If you are overseas you should contact the local British Embassy or High Commission. You can find details about how to contact the Embassy or High Commission at www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations. If your child has been abducted, we can tell you whether the country which your child has been taken to is operating the 1980 Hague Convention. This is a multilateral treaty which includes a process for returning children under 16 who have been abducted overseas by a parent (although this outcome is not always guaranteed). The UK is party to the Convention, as are many other countries. If the country your child is in is a signatory, we can put you in touch with the central authorities in the UK so that you can submit relevant Hague applications.
- > If the country which your child has been taken to is not operating the Hague Convention, and you cannot come to an agreement with the other parent, you may need to apply for custody and permission to bring your child back to the UK through the courts overseas. We can give you a list of English speaking lawyers in the country. Some may be specialists in family law. However, we cannot pay any legal fees ourselves or offer legal advice.
- > Where appropriate, we can ask consular staff overseas to contact the local courts to express an interest in a case and ask about progress. We cannot, however, interfere in foreign court proceedings.
- > We can give you basic practical information about the customs and procedures of the country to which your child has been taken. We can also provide travel information and, if necessary, offer guidance on finding accommodation locally. We can help you contact the relevant local authorities and organisations when you are overseas.
- > If you want us to, we can contact the relevant UK police force to ask about progress in tracing your child and whether they have contacted the police overseas to assist in finding the child.
- > If your child is found, and if the other parent agrees, we may be able to arrange a consular visit to your child.
- > If you do not know where your child is we can try to verify with immigration whether your child has arrived in a particular country. We can also contact the relevant authorities overseas to check what progress has been made in finding him or her if you have reported them missing with the police overseas.
- > If you are both willing, we can pass information between you and the other parent about your child. Grandparents may also be involved in custody cases, for example, where one parent has died. You should be aware that, in some countries, local law can favour the paternal grandparents (the father's parents) over the mother. That makes it even more important to have formal residence arrangements in place before giving permission for the child to leave the UK.
- > We can put you in touch with Reunite International Child Abduction Centre www.reunite.org for further advice and guidance.
- > We cannot 'rescue' a child, help to remove them illegally from where they are staying, or illegally facilitate their return to the UK.
- > We have a leaflet called 'International parental child abduction' (with more general information) and a separate leaflet on 'Parental Child Abduction and the UK-Pakistan Protocol' (with details of an agreement with Pakistan about handling these cases). You will find details at www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-parental-child-abduction.

If you are affected by a crisis overseas

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

In some circumstances, there may be limits to the assistance we can provide in a crisis – please take sensible precautions, read and follow our travel advice and take responsibility for your own safety first. This applies particularly if you are travelling to or living in a location where there is a high risk of terrorism, unrest or natural disasters. We have a duty of care to our employees and we will not send our staff into a situation where we judge that their safety could be seriously at risk.

What is a crisis?

There are three broad types of incident which could require a crisis response:

- > An incident in which large numbers of British nationals may have been killed or injured, or which continues to pose a danger to you. This includes terrorist attacks, major transport accidents, major pandemics and natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis.
- > Civil or political unrest which causes us to advise you to leave the country and where in exceptional circumstances we may assist your departure or evacuate you.
- > Events which – whilst not generally threatening lives – cause disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals. This includes incidents such as volcanic ash, the collapse of travel companies and major airport shutdowns. In such incidents, the FCO might provide exceptional help and assistance to those affected.

Who we can help in a crisis

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

- > British nationals (whether or not they normally live in the UK – but see page 5);
- > British nationals with another nationality – ‘dual nationals’;
- > In certain situations, other eligible persons including nationals of other European Union member states and Commonwealth nationals who do not have an Embassy of their own to get help from, and family members of British nationals (spouse/partner and dependent children aged 18 years and under only – we cannot assist other family members);
- > We cannot provide support to other countries’ nationals, even if they may have been lawfully living in the UK.

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

Due to the exceptional nature of crises, it is impossible to predict every eventuality. The advice below is not exhaustive but rather, it is an outline of the principles we follow when assisting British nationals and other eligible people in a crisis.

How we may help you

- > Work with local authorities – including hospitals and police – to establish the facts of the incident and if British nationals have been involved. This is our first priority in any crisis – but it can take time as we have to ensure our information is accurate, to avoid causing unnecessary distress for families.
- > Support you if you are injured in a crisis incident.
- > Support you if you are trying to leave the affected area or get in contact with your families to tell them you are safe.
- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on **www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice** as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > Deploy expert teams to support British nationals and to reinforce our Embassy staff, if required. Alongside FCO consular experts these teams can include experts from the British Red Cross and the UK Police Disaster Victim Identification teams.
- > Set up an information hotline, SMS and online webform facilities for people to contact us.
- > Support the families of any British nationals killed in an incident – in particular around the repatriation of bodies to the UK.
- > Support you if you are a relative of a victim coming out to the scene, including meeting you at the airport, arranging and attending meetings with local authorities or providing information on local accommodation options.

What we ask from you

- > Read about the precautions you should take in case of a crisis overseas at **www.gov.uk/how-to-deal-with-a-crisis-overseas**.
- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. Subscribe to email alerts (**public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new**) to receive real-time travel advice updates. You should be aware that your insurance may no longer be valid if you do not follow our travel advice.
- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts.

facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts.

- > Take out adequate travel insurance if a tourist. Expatriates should assess and consider the risks against any personal or corporate insurance policies.
- > If you are working overseas, familiarise yourself with your own employer's evacuation and crisis policies, particularly in high risk destinations. Ensure your employer has your next of kin details.
- > Where requested by our staff, agree to pay back any costs we incur on your behalf (e.g. travel costs, travel documents, cash advances) by signing an Undertaking to Repay form.

Terrorist Attacks

Terrorist attacks are exceptional because the individuals involved are random victims of attacks directed at society as a whole. In order to take account of this we have put in place Exceptional Assistance Measures for the victims of terrorist attacks abroad, and their families. See **gov.uk** for information.

- > The details and availability of this assistance will vary according to the particular circumstances of each situation, and it can only be provided as a last resort, if the costs are not covered by existing insurance policies, employer schemes, the government of the country involved or other sources.
- > We will not provide this financial assistance if you have travelled against our travel advice.

Pandemics

- > During a pandemic we will, as far as possible, continue to deliver a consular service if you are resident or travelling abroad through our network of British Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates. But this may be limited, depending on the scale and severity of the situation. In extreme cases we may have to close our Embassies, High Commissions or Consulates. Some countries might close their borders, international transport could be severely disrupted or halted, and travel could become medically inadvisable. We will not be able to repatriate you during a pandemic.

Civil or political unrest which causes us to advise you to leave the country

- > If a country is facing civil or political unrest, our priority will be providing clear information to you, including advice on whether to leave the country. We will do this through our travel advice and other media (news networks, Facebook, Twitter). As communication channels such as mobiles and the internet can go down during a crisis, we tailor our response to the local situation and may use more traditional communication tools such as local radio, community notice boards and warden networks to push out information in a crisis.
- > In very exceptional circumstances we may help you leave by organising an assisted departure, charter flights or an evacuation. However, the situation on the ground may mean that our ability to do so is very limited, particularly in countries where we have been advising departure for some time.

How we may help you

- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on gov.uk as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > If required, deploy expert teams to help you and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground.
- > Set up an information hotline, SMS and online webform facilities for people to contact us in the UK, if required.
- > Set up an information desk at the airport or closest point of safety, if required.
- > In exceptional circumstances, organise an assisted departure where we help you to access transport or provide additional transport to supplement existing options, so that you can leave a country in line with our travel advice.
- > Charge a reasonable fee for seats on charter flights which we would ask you to repay at a later date (you will be asked to sign an Undertaking to Repay form), given that those who left earlier would have paid for their seat on scheduled flights.
- > In exceptional circumstances, use military aircraft or vessels to evacuate British nationals, when all other transport options have been exhausted or do not exist.

- > In the event of an evacuation provide transport to an appropriate place of safety. You should be aware that this is usually to a safe third country and not to the UK.
- > Work closely with other countries to make best use of charter flights and military transport where appropriate.

What we ask from you

- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. Subscribe to email alerts (public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new) to receive real-time travel advice updates. You should be aware that your insurance may no longer be valid if you do not follow our travel advice.
- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts.
- > Leave the country at the earliest opportunity, in line with our travel advice. This may be complex if you are a permanent resident with family or business interests in the country. However, if you do not, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to assist you to leave the country at a later stage.
- > Keep your passport up to date. If your immediate family members⁹ are not British nationals ensure that they have valid and up to date travel documents for the country of their nationality.
- > During a crisis, UK passport or visa services may be extremely limited, which could make leaving with your non-British national family members more complicated.
- > Agree to pay a fee (by signing an Undertaking to Repay form) if we provide travel documentation and/or organise charter flights or other transport options as part of an assisted departure or evacuation.

Note 9:

Spouse/partner and dependent children aged 18 years and under.

Events causing disruption and hardship to large numbers of British nationals

These events (volcanic ash, shutdown of airports due to weather or protests, collapse of travel companies) are generally not life-threatening. But they can cause massive disruption. In these incidents our priority is to work with airlines, airports, travel companies and the local authorities to provide British nationals with clear information about the situation, their rights and options. We also support British nationals who are experiencing serious health problems due to the disruption.

How we may help you

- > Liaise with tour operators and commercial airlines to give you the best possible information about their response to incidents which cause significant disruption to travel.
- > Provide travel advice and crisis updates on gov.uk as well as on our Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) travel advice sites.
- > Deploy expert teams to help you and to reinforce our Embassy staff on the ground, if required.
- > Set up an information hotline, SMS and online webform facilities so people can contact us, if required.
- > Set up an information desk at the airport or other border points, if required.
- > Help you to access medical treatment or medication if you are suffering serious medical problems as a result of the disruption.
- > If you are running out of money abroad, provide information on how to transfer money and help you contact relatives and friends. In these incidents we will not make payments from public funds.

What we ask from you

- > Read and follow our travel advice and information given by the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate or through the network of wardens who work on our behalf. Subscribe to email alerts (public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new) to receive real-time travel advice updates. If you do not our ability to help will be limited.

- > Subscribe to FCO and the local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate Facebook (www.facebook.com/fcotravel) and Twitter (twitter.com/fcotravel) accounts, to receive realtime travel advice updates;
- > Find out if your holiday is ATOL protected and what your rights are in the event that your tour operator or travel company collapses before or during your holiday (see www.caa.co.uk for more information).

Support after a crisis

- > We provide support to British nationals abroad. But often, victims of a crisis overseas or their families need further help when they return to the UK. We work with support organisations at certain UK airports (Heathrow and Gatwick Travel Cares, and Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow Chaplaincies), to look after victims' immediate needs on arrival in the UK.

Support for British nationals who are not ordinarily resident¹⁰ in the UK

- > If you are a British national returning to the United Kingdom after living abroad, or if you are a British national but have never lived in the UK, you may not be automatically entitled to state benefits, a state retirement pension, free NHS hospital treatment or assistance with higher education fees. To be eligible for any of these, a British national must meet certain residence requirements and/or make the appropriate National Insurance contributions. British nationality or past/present payment of UK taxes and National Insurance contributions are not taken into consideration when establishing residence.
- > The Gov.uk website has information on benefits and services, employment, tax and education, and you can get free, independent advice from the Citizens Advice Bureaux (www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

Note 10:

Concept of ordinarily resident in the UK: someone who is living lawfully in the United Kingdom voluntarily and for settled purposes as part of the regular order of their life for the time being, with an identifiable purpose for their residence here which has a sufficient degree of continuity to be properly described as settled.

Tell us what you think

Giving us feedback

We welcome your views on the support we provide. They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. Please look at the FCO website for details of how to provide feedback including through surveys (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office/about/research). Alternatively you can ask your local British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate for details or email feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk with your comments.

Official complaints procedure

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

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

There are three stages to our complaints procedure.

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

Customer Interaction Team
Consular Directorate
WH4.2
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

- > We will investigate your complaint fully.
- > We will do our best to give you a full reply within 20 working days. If we cannot give you a full reply within this time, we will tell you when we expect to do so.
- > We will record and examine complaints, and use the information to help make sure we offer the best possible help and support.

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

Consular Director
WHMZ4.2
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

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

The Director will see all complaints and will ask for an investigation to be carried out by a member of staff who is not directly connected to your case or to your complaint. This person will usually be senior to any officer against whom a complaint has been made.

Stage 3. If you are not satisfied with the response from the Consular Director, then you can write directly to either a Foreign Office Minister, or your Member of Parliament (MP), asking them to raise your complaint with us.

Alternatively you can contact the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will normally only consider cases that have previously followed our three stage process and relates to “maladministration” (a service failure including poor administration or applying the rules incorrectly). There are more details about this in 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 citizens.

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



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

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

Parental Child abduction and the UK-Pakistan protocol

Mental Health

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Transfers home for prisoners abroad

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Visiting friends and family checklist

What is a Forced Marriage?

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