

# Missing persons abroad



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



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When a relative or friend goes missing abroad it can be very distressing and you may feel at a loss as to what to do about it.

This leaflet explains what practical help our consular staff can offer you, what you may wish to do yourself, and where you can go for additional help.

It is important to distinguish between people who have been travelling and keeping in regular contact with family and friends and who are now believed to be missing, and those with whom families have lost contact over a number of years. If you wish to trace someone with whom you have long ago lost contact, you may need to employ the services of a solicitor or a tracing agency.

## **How to report a missing person**

If you suspect that a relative or friend is missing abroad you should contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London on 020 7008 1500 and ask for Consular Directorate, stating the country in which you think the person is missing, if possible. If you are abroad yourself, contact the nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. It is important that you provide as much information as possible about the missing person, for example:

- > name, date and place of birth
- > passport details
- > insurance details
- > itinerary
- > the last place, date and time contact was made
- > mobile phone number/email address.

## **Informing the UK police**

You, or a relative in the UK, should report the person missing to your local police in the UK with a specific request that they inform the UK National Central Bureau of Interpol, who have resources and jurisdiction to investigate missing persons and liaise with foreign police.

You should be aware that responsibility for conducting searches overseas rests with the local police force abroad.

UK police forces sometimes become involved by assisting with matters such as enquiries into a missing person's financial transactions.

Only occasionally do UK police forces become more actively involved in the investigation. They can only do so at the invitation of the government of the country in which your relative or friend is missing. International police co-operation is agreed and co-ordinated through Interpol (you should note that Interpol do not accept enquiries from members of the public).

## **What our consular staff can do**

We can check our records to see if there is any trace of your relative or friend. If they have come to our attention, the Data Protection Act 1998 may limit the information we would be able to pass on to you (see note 1). We also have a duty to respect the privacy of our consular customers.

We can liaise with the local authorities (police, mountain rescue, army etc.) and keep you informed of their progress.

We can pass on to the appropriate UK authorities any requests from host governments for help in mounting a search, rescue and recovery operation.

### **Note 1:**

We keep and use personal information in line with this Act, and may release it to other UK government departments and public authorities.

We can provide you with contact details of any relevant local charitable and voluntary organisations specialising in tracing missing persons. Where appropriate, we can pass you information on the federation or association of any locally established private detective industry (see note 2).

We will appoint a case worker in London who will maintain contact with you and inform you if we are told of any new developments by the investigating authorities.

If you decide to travel abroad to search for your relative or friend, staff at the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can be available to meet you and offer information on local conditions. They can also help arrange meetings with the local authorities and investigating agencies.

## **What our consular staff cannot do**

We cannot conduct physical searches on your behalf, even where the local investigating authority is not considered effective.

We cannot use public funds to finance rescue operations for people missing in remote areas nor pay for the recovery or repatriation of the body in the unfortunate circumstances where this may be necessary. Costs should be met by relatives or the insurance company.

### **Note 2:**

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

We cannot control media coverage, in the UK or abroad. We will not give out information that is not in the public domain. However, you should be aware that the media may take an interest in a missing person and may be persistent in obtaining background information from family and friends. Information of varying reliability may also appear on the internet.

## **What you can do yourself**

The most appropriate course of action will depend on your particular circumstances. However, you may wish to consider the following when trying to trace your relative or friend:

When and why were you expecting contact from your relative or friend? Was there anything in their last communication with you which might indicate where they are and why they might not have got in touch with you as expected?

You could compare notes with the family of any travelling companion and anyone who may have received phone calls, emails or letters from the missing person.

Your friend or relative's bank, building society or internet service provider may be able to give you some information on when their account was last accessed. They may require official police intervention before agreeing to such a request.

If you decide to travel to the region where your relative or friend went missing, you should consider what you would be able to achieve. If language is a problem, you might have to employ an interpreter. Local authorities may be reluctant to pass on information and we cannot insist that they do. Neither can we insist that they treat your situation differently than they would any other missing person in their country.

Searches can sometimes be publicised through press conferences or TV appeals either in the UK or in the country where your relative or friend is missing. If you do wish to do this abroad, we may be able to facilitate a press conference.

You might want to initiate a poster and leaflet campaign in the country concerned. We can provide information on local printing companies and on locations where a poster can be placed.

In some countries it is possible to offer rewards for information. It is important to consider the implications of offering a reward and you may want to discuss this with an organisation that has experience in tracing missing persons.

Some insurance policies will cover search and rescue costs. If you have details of your relative's insurance, you should check the cover and contact them if this is a possibility.

There are also some things you may wish to prepare to assist with identification if that becomes necessary. Identify and keep safe a personal item such as a tooth/hair brush or razor, which could yield a DNA profile. Also select the most recent and appropriate photograph you have of your relative or friend.

We have a publication called 'Support for British nationals abroad: A guide', which you may also find helpful. You can find details on our travel website: **[www.fco.gov.uk/travel](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel)**, under 'Our publications'.



## Who else might be able to help

You may wish to contact one or all of the following organisations, which provide resources to assist in searching for missing people or have considerable experience in tracing missing people abroad themselves (see note 2 on page 4).

### **The Committee for Missing Children**

This US based organisation is an advocacy group for the parents of missing and abducted children. It distributes photographs of missing children around the world. It also acts as a clearing house, gathering and sharing information about missing children and providing a range of links to other resources. It also has links to a European branch.

**[www.findthekids.org/](http://www.findthekids.org/)**

### **Look 4 Them**

This website is the joint initiative of nine UK organisations, set up to make it easier to find help and advice. It includes links to, among others, the organisations below.

**[www.look4them.org](http://www.look4them.org)**

### **The Salvation Army**

Family Tracing Service  
101 Newington Causeway  
London, SE1 6BN

Tel: UK 0845 634 4747 (local rate)  
or 020 7367 4747

**[www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)**

### **International Social Service of the UK (ISS UK)**

Cranmer House  
39 Brixton Road  
London, SW9 6DD

Tel: 020 7735 8941

Email: [mark.issuk@btopenworld.com](mailto:mark.issuk@btopenworld.com)

**[www.iss.org.uk](http://www.iss.org.uk)**

### **British Red Cross**

International Tracing and Message Services  
44 Moorfields  
London, EC2Y 9AL

Tel: 0870 170 7000

Email: [iwd@redcross.org.uk](mailto:iwd@redcross.org.uk)

**[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)**

### **National Missing Persons Helpline**

PO Box 28908  
London, SW14 7ZU

Freephone: 0500 700 700 (from the UK)  
or 0044 (0) 20 8392 4545 (outside the UK)

Email: [enquiries@missingpersons.org](mailto:enquiries@missingpersons.org)

**[www.missingpersons.org](http://www.missingpersons.org)**

### **Lucie Blackman Trust**

14 Belvedere Street  
Ryde  
Isle of Wight  
PO33 2JW

Tel: 020 7047 5060/01983 565 112

24 hour helpline: 07976 854 535

Email: [info@lbtrust.org](mailto:info@lbtrust.org)

**[www.lucieblackmantrust.org](http://www.lucieblackmantrust.org)**

## **Feedback**

If you need to get in touch with a British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate when overseas, we would welcome any comments on the support you receive. Please write to us at:

### **Feedback**

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

Phone: 020 7008 1500

Fax: 020 7008 0152

E-mail: [feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk](mailto:feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk)



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

## Giving us feedback

Please email the following address:  
[Feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk](mailto:Feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk)

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