UK MISSING PERSONS BUREAU

Has someone you know gone missing?

What to do when someone goes missing abroad

Factsheet 6

It can be a traumatic experience when someone goes missing and it may be especially hard to know what to do when someone goes missing abroad. Helpful information on how to report the person missing and how to access help is outlined below.

Report the person missing

If you have recently lost contact with a family member who is travelling overseas, the first thing to do is report the person as missing to the police.

If you are in the UK

If you are in the UK, you should report the person as missing to the UK police. Ideally this should be to the police force for the area in which the person normally lives, although if you report it to a different police force, they should pass the details on to the relevant force. Telephone numbers for the police can be found in the phone book or online at www.police.uk/?view-force_sites – many police forces use the 101 non-emergency number, which can be used to report a missing person.

After the police take down the details of the missing person, they may inform Interpol, which can liaise with the relevant foreign police force, because the UK police does not have the automatic right to investigate on foreign soil when someone goes missing overseas. Interpol may then ask for enquiries to be made in the country in which the person was last seen. However, it is important to note that Interpol will normally only become involved if the missing person is believed to be at risk of harm.

If you suspect a relative or friend has gone missing abroad, you should contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on **0207 008 1500** and ask for the Consular Directorate. You will need to provide them with details of the country the person is believed to have gone missing in, where they were last seen and where you last had contact with them. The FCO can only help in cases where regular contact has unexpectedly been lost. They cannot help if you wish to trace someone you lost contact with a long time ago. Advice and assistance can also be provided by the UK Missing Persons Bureau on **0845 000 5481.**

If you are abroad

If you are abroad, you should report the person as missing to the local police in the country you are in. Provide as much information as possible and the police will pass on the details to Interpol, so that the investigating team can co-ordinate with the UK authorities. Make a note of any reference numbers they give you. The local police force has jurisdiction and should make enquiries to help find the missing person.

If you are abroad, you should also telephone the UK police to report the person missing. You should report the person missing to the police force for the area where the person normally lives. The telephone numbers for UK police forces can be obtained from the website www.police.uk/?view=force_sites or the police force's own website. When you report the person missing, provide as much information as possible, including any reference numbers given to you by the police in the country you are currently in. The UK police force may inform Interpol, which can liaise with the relevant foreign police force. Again, it is important to note that Interpol will normally

only be involved if the missing person is believed to be at risk of harm.
If you are overseas, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) may also be able to assist you. The best way to access help is to locate the nearest British Embassy and report the person missing to them. You can use the FCO website www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/find-an-embassy to find a British Embassy near you. You can also contact the FCO in the UK **+44 (0)207 008 1500** and ask for the Consular Directorate. You will also need to provide them with details of the country the person is believed to have gone missing in, where they were last seen and when you last had contact with them. Advice and assistance can also be provided by the UK Missing Persons Bureau **+44 (0)845 000 5481**

If you are in Europe and your child has gone missing, you should still contact the local police, the UK police and the FCO. Additionally, you can also call the **116 000** hotline number which has been created as a helpline in case a child goes missing.

The 116 000 phone number provides a way for parents to immediately get in contact with an organisation which can support them and provide assistance if their child has gone missing. **Remember that you still need to report your child missing to the police**. The 116 000 number will be answered by a charity in the country you are calling from, which deals with missing children. The charity should be able to provide information and assistance and put you in contact with local authorities. The 116 000 number can also be used to take sighting reports and other information from members of the public, which can then be passed on to the relevant police force.

The 116 000 number is currently operating in the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK.

Information you should provide

When reporting a person missing abroad, you should try to provide as much information as possible about the missing person, such as:

- Name, date and place of birth
- The time and place that last contact was made
- Their travel itinerary and where you think they may be
- Mobile phone number and/or email address
- Their passport details
- The name of the company they have travel insurance with and any other details of their travel insurance policy that you may have
- A recent photograph.

If your friend or relative uses an internet site which they regularly update with details of where they are and perhaps who they are with, it is important that this information is also provided to the police and the FCO. For example, this might be an online travel blog, a personal website, a social networking site or a photo site, such as Flickr. Some of these sites may include geocoded or geotagged photographs uploaded by the missing person, which might include location information that may be of use to the investigation.

What the police can do to help

Please be aware that responsibility for conducting searches overseas rests with the local police force in the country where the person has gone missing.

The UK police may assist with enquiries, but it is rare for them to become actively involved in the case. This is because they do not have the legal authority to carry out an investigation outside the UK and they can only do so with the permission of the country involved.

However, in some cases, the UK police can send requests via Interpol to the police force in the country where the person has gone missing, asking for enquiries to be made.

In some circumstances, the UK police may be granted permission to travel to the country where the person has gone missing, but this is rare and depends on permission being granted by that country. Even if a UK police force is given permission to travel to the country, they still might not be given permission to actively carry out any enquiries.
Sometimes, the police in the UK may be able to carry out some helpful enquiries in the UK to assist the search for you missing loved one. For example, checking financial records and

collecting forensic material, such as DNA or fingerprints.

Financial records

In some cases, the missing person's UK bank or building society may be able to advise the police when and where their account was last accessed. The bank may require an official police request from a UK police force before they agree to provide this information. In some cases, it may be necessary for the police in the country where the person has gone missing to place this request via Interpol.

Forensic material

DNA samples and other forensic material like fingerprints and dental records may be useful to the investigation and may be collected by the police. You may wish to identify a personal item belonging to the missing person to give to the police. A toothbrush, hairbrush or razor could provide a DNA profile, as long as this was only used by the missing person. In some cases, it may be helpful for a relative to provide a sample. There is a UK Missing Persons DNA Database which contains profiles for individuals who have gone missing and for unidentified persons, bodies and body parts. There is also a DNA database maintained by Interpol in Lyon, France, to collect and compare DNA across international borders for Interpol's member countries. In some cases it may be relevant for the missing person's DNA to be checked against this. However, the Interpol database does not hold a large number of profiles and due to differences in DNA collection and sampling in different countries, it may not always be appropriate to check DNA against the Interpol database.

What the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can do to help

The FCO can help in cases where regular contact has been unexpectedly lost. The FCO cannot help if you are trying to trace someone who you lost contact with a long time ago. The FCO may be able to:

- Check their records to see if the missing person has come to their attention (although the Data Protection Act 1998 may prevent them from releasing information without the person's consent)
- Liaise with the local authorities; they will keep you informed of their progress
- Pass on to the appropriate UK authorities any requests from host governments for help in mounting a search, rescue and recovery operation
- Provide you with details of any local organisations specialising in tracing missing persons
- Provide contact details for local private detectives. However, they cannot guarantee the professional capability of any person or company
- Appoint a caseworker in London with whom you cam liaise
- Embassy staff can arrange to meet you if you are already abroad or if you decide to travel abroad to search yourself
- Arrange press or TV appeals in the relevant country
- Provide information on local printing companies, should you wish to initiate a poster and leaflet campaign. They can advise you on suitable poster locations.

What the FCO cannot do

- Conduct physical searches on your behalf
- Provide financial assistance for rescue operations of people in remote areas
- Pay for a body to be returned to the UK
- Control media coverage of the case.

Information to help you locate your nearest British Embassy if you are overseas can be found at www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/find-an-embassy
Contact details for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO):

Telephone:	**0207 008 1500**
Website:	**www.fco.gov.uk**

What you can do

Consider the following when trying to trace a person believed to be missing abroad:

- When and why were you expecting contact from them?
- Was there anything in their last communication with you that might suggest where they are now or why they might not have been in touch?
- Was there anything posted on their online social networking, blogging or information sharing websites that might suggest where they are now and/or who they may recently have been with?
- You may wish to contact the family of any travelling companions or other people with whom the missing person might have been in contact with whilst abroad, to see if they have any helpful information
- In some countries, it may be possible to offer a reward for information. Consider the implications of this and contact an organisation that has experience of tracing missing persons for advice, such as Missing Abroad
- Consider what you would be able to achieve by travelling to the country yourself. Local authorities may be reluctant to pass on information.

Other organisations

There are other organisations which may be able to provide you with assistance:

Missing Abroad

Missing Abroad is a charity which provides support and advice to those whose family or friends are missing overseas. More information can be obtained from their website or by contacting them directly.

Telephone: **0207 047 5060**

Email: **operations@missingabroad.org**

Website: **www.missingabroad.org**

FCO International Child Abduction Section

The FCO's International Child Abduction Section assists British and Dual British nationals affected by parental child abduction or residence and contact disputes.

Telephone: **0207 008 0878**

Out of hours: **0207 008 1500**

Website: **www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/child-abduction**

International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU)

The International Child Abduction and Contact Unit is the Central Authority in England and Wales for the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. The ICACU is based within the Office of the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee. They may be able to help if your child has been taken abroad without your consent and kept overseas against your wishes.

Telephone: **0207 911 7127**

Email: **enquiries@offsol.gsi.gov.uk**

Website: **http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/protecting-the-vulnerable/official-solicitor/international-child-abduction-and-contact-unit/index.htm**

FCO Forced Marriage Unit

If you are worried that someone may have stopped contact or be missing due to having been forced into marriage, the FCO Forced Marriage Unit can provide confidential advice and assistance to:

- Those who have been forced into marriage
- Those at risk of being forced into marriage
- People worried about friends or relatives who may have been forced into marriage.

More information can be accessed via the FCO FMU website.

Telephone: **0207 008 0151**

Email: **fmu@fco.gov.uk**

Website: **http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/forced-marriage**

Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB)

Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB) assists people who have been separated from family members as a result of divorce, migration, seeking asylum, trafficking and abduction. It also supports people for whom there are protection concerns, including children and vulnerable adults who may have been abducted or trafficked. CFAB assists in cases where children are separated from one or both parents, CFAB aims to reunite children with their families and assist children and adults to re-establish and maintain contact with parents and family members.

Telephone: **0207 735 8941**
(free advice and information hotline)

Email: **info@cfab.uk.net**

Website: **www.cfab.uk.net**

UK Missing Persons Bureau

The Missing Persons Bureau works alongside the police and related organisations to help find missing people.

Telephone: **0845 000 5481**

Email:

missingpersonsbureau@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk

Website: **www.missingpersons.police.uk**

The following organisations may be able to assist people who have lost contact with a relative at home or abroad, over a long period of time. They may not be able to help if you have recently lost contact with a family member who is travelling overseas, however.

The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army provides a service for tracing adult relatives with whom contact has been lost. Its Family Tracing Service operates in 100 countries throughout the world.

Telephone: **0207 367 4747**
(Mon-Fri 8:15am to 3:15pm)

Website:

www.salvationarmy.org.uk/familytracing

British Red Cross

It's international family tracing and message exchange services are aimed at restoring and maintaining family links between close relatives who have been separated as a result of armed conflict, natural or other disasters.

Telephone: **0207 235 5454**

Email: **itms2@redcross.org.uk**

Website: **www.redcross.org.uk/trace**

General Register Office

The Overseas Department of the General Register Office holds records of births, marriages and deaths of British Citizens overseas that have been registered with British authorities.

Telephone: **0845 603 7788**

Email: **certificate.services@ips.gsi.gov.uk**

Website:

https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/faqs-overseas.asp

You may also find the factsheet *Organisations that provide help and support* useful. This, and other factsheets, can be downloaded from the UK Missing Persons Bureau website www.missingpersons.police.uk