

GSC Marking	OFFICIAL
Title	Reporting the death in the UK of a foreign national
Summary	JICC guidance on reporting the death in the UK of a foreign national to foreign authorities and next of kin overseas.
Branch	Joint International Crime Centre (JICC)
Date created	17/02/2023
Review date	17/02/2025
Version	7.0
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Reporting the Death in the UK of a Foreign National

March 2023

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Introduction

1. This operational guidance is for police officers in the United Kingdom. It provides advice on the correct routes for reporting the unexpected or suspicious death or serious injury of a foreign citizen in the UK to their national authorities and next of kin.

1963 Vienna Convention

2. Article 37 of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations puts a duty on the authorities of a country to inform a foreign consulate **without delay** of the death of one of their nationals. This is relevant for UK police officers investigating the death (or injury likely to prove fatal) of a foreign national in the UK.

Death or serious injury of a foreign national

3. A foreign consulate is always the preferred channel of communication to:
- **Identify next of kin overseas of a foreign national in the UK; and**
 - **Pass an urgent message to a foreign country of a foreign national's death or a serious injury likely to prove fatal.**

Police officers often call these urgent messages “compassionate messages” or “death messages”. The consulate is usually located in a country’s embassy, and looks after the interests of its citizens in the host country. Note that the nearest consulate of a particular country may not be in London—and in a few cases might not even be in the UK.

4. In the event of the:
- **Expected death which has been reported or investigated by police**
 - **Unexpected, non-suspicious death**
 - **Serious injury likely to prove fatal**

of a foreign national which has been reported to police, it will usually be the responsibility of the owning police force Basic Command Unit (BCU) or equivalent police command unit to inform the relevant consulate.

5. If police do not report or investigate the expected death of a foreign national in the UK (e.g. the expected death of a terminally ill patient in hospital or at home), there is no requirement for police to inform the next of kin or report the death to the consulate.

6. If initial investigation by police identifies a person deceased in the UK as a foreign national (e.g. they are in possession of foreign identity documents), the BCU should make every effort to immediately:

- **Contact the relevant consulate, and**
- **Inform them of the death of their national.**

If police have not identified any next of kin in the UK, the BCU should ask the consulate to pass an urgent compassionate message to the next of kin overseas. If police refer the death to the coroner, the BCU should inform the coroner that the consulate has been informed.

Where the death or serious injury is under investigation or a homicide, the BCU should liaise with the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) to confirm who will notify the consulate.

In Scotland, where the death or serious injury is under investigation or a homicide, the Lord Advocate as Ministerial Head of the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) has responsibility for the direction of investigations. The appointed SIO (in liaison with the Procurator Fiscal from the COPFS Homicide Team) will confirm who will notify the consulate.

7. In the event that a different agency (e.g. the Health & Safety Executive) takes over a death investigation before police have notified the consulate, responsibility for notification will usually remain with the original police investigation team unless both the police and agency SIOs agree otherwise.

Contacting foreign consulates

8. The gov.uk page at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassiesin-the-uk> contains a list of all consulates in the UK and email, web and phone contact details. Many consular web sites provide 24/7 contact details out of hours, e.g. an emergency phone number or message facility to speak to the on-call officer.

9. It may not always be possible to contact the relevant consulate without delay (e.g. over a Bank Holiday weekend where the consulate has no 24/7 emergency number).

In this case police should use INTERPOL channels to pass a compassionate message request to the country in question, using an INTERPOL Enquiry Form (IEF) via INTERPOL Manchester. The message should ask police in the country to identify next of kin and pass on the message. To prevent delay, officers should mention in the IEF that attempts to contact the consulate were unsuccessful.

10. Officers should be aware of their local force procedures for submitting IEFs; police typically create them using the INTERPOL Smart Tools app and submit them through their force intelligence bureau or force international liaison officer. Note that for countries outside the EU and Five Eyes communities, INTERPOL Manchester will require a risk assessment.



11. Always inform the consulate in the UK if INTERPOL enquiries are in progress. This reduces the risk of the next of kin receiving compassionate messages at different times through different channels.

Death of a UK national

12. In the event of the death of a UK national in the UK where the next of kin is overseas, INTERPOL is the preferred channel to pass details of the death to the country in question and request delivery of a compassionate message, using the INTERPOL Enquiry Form.

13. In the event of the death of a UK national overseas where the next of kin is in the UK, the usual channel for informing next of kin will be incoming from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to the local police force in the UK. The FCDO will provide details of the FCDO contact in the country where the UK national died. If the UK national died as the result of homicide, the FCDO may ask the local police force to appoint a Family Liaison Officer (FLO).

14. In the event of the death of a UK national overseas where the next of kin is in a different foreign country, the channels used to inform the next of kin will vary depending on circumstances, but are likely to be a national consulate, INTERPOL or the FCDO.

Inbound compassionate messages

15. In the event of the death of a foreign national overseas where the next of kin is in the UK, the usual channel for informing next of kin will be incoming from foreign police via INTERPOL to the local police force in the UK.

Information required by foreign authorities

16. At a minimum, police should consider providing the following information to the consulate or foreign police force, if available:

- Name of deceased
- Date and place of birth
- Any relevant foreign ID numbers e.g. passport/identity card/driving licence
- Location of foreign ID documents e.g. property reference numbers
- Addresses in UK and/or overseas
- Next of kin, if known
- Circumstances of the death/serious injury
 - Date
 - Location
 - How/what happened
 - What is likely to happen next
- Where the subject is now
- Relevant UK contact details e.g. officer in the case, coroner, HSE investigator, hospital

17. Remember that any correspondence generated through these processes may need to be retained and scheduled for disclosure purposes where an investigation arises.

18. In some cases the family of a foreign citizen deceased in the UK will arrange for the repatriation of the body or cremated remains to their country of origin for burial there. Some jurisdictions require the original passport or other ID document of the deceased person in order to authorise repatriation. Remember to note the location and reference numbers of any foreign ID documents in police possession and consider providing it to the consulate or foreign police.

19. The NPCC Joint International Crime Centre (JICC) provides tactical advice to police on all aspects of international cooperation including investigations of death and serious injury involving foreign nationals. Officers can contact the JICC 24/7 on 0300 790 0000.

Table 1. Compassionate messages

Situation	Responsible for creating message	Channel for message
• Death • Foreign national in the UK • Expected – no police involvement	If police do not report or investigate the expected death of a foreign national in the UK (e.g. the expected death of a terminally ill patient), there is no requirement for police to inform the next of kin or report the death to the consulate.	Not applicable – no police involvement.
• Death • Foreign national in the UK • Expected – when reported by police.	This is only relevant if the expected death has been reported or investigated by police. If police do not report or investigate the expected death of a foreign national in the UK (e.g. the expected death of a terminally ill patient), there is no requirement for police to inform the next of kin or report the death to the consulate. If police have reported the death, the owning Basic Command Unit (BCU) informs the consulate.	First contact usually via phone or email. If it is not possible to contact the consulate (e.g. out of hours) the BCU should use an INTERPOL Enquiry Form to pass a next of kin compassionate message request to the country in question. The BCU should inform the consulate that police have sent details via INTERPOL. BCU should inform coroner that the consulate is aware.



	In the event there is no next of kin identified in the UK, the BCU should ask the consulate to pass a compassionate message to the next of kin overseas.	
• Death or serious injury • Foreign national in the UK • Unexpected • Non-suspicious	Owning Basic Command Unit (BCU) informs the consulate. In the event there is no next of kin identified in the UK, the BCU should ask the consulate to pass a compassionate message to the next of kin overseas.	First contact usually via phone or email. If it is not possible to contact the consulate (e.g. out of hours) the BCU should use an INTERPOL Enquiry Form to pass a next of kin compassionate message request to the country in question. The BCU should

		inform the consulate that police have sent details via INTERPOL. BCU should inform coroner that the consulate is aware.
• Death or serious injury • Foreign national in the UK • Under investigation or homicide	The Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) will decide who will notify the consulate. In the event there is no next of kin identified in the UK, the SIO will decide who should ask the consulate to pass a compassionate message to the next of kin overseas. In Scotland the SIO (in liaison with the Procurator Fiscal from the COPFS Homicide Team) will confirm who will notify the consulate.	First contact usually via phone or email. If it is not possible to contact the consulate (e.g. out of hours) the BCU or investigation team should use an INTERPOL Enquiry Form to pass a next of kin compassionate message request to the country in question. The BCU or investigation team should inform the consulate that police have sent details via INTERPOL.



	In the event that another agency (e.g. Health & Safety Executive) takes over the investigation, responsibility for notification will usually remain with the original police investigation team unless both SIOs agree otherwise.	BCU should inform coroner that the consulate is aware.
• Death or serious injury • UK national in the UK • Next of kin is overseas • Expected • Non-suspicious	Owning Basic Command Unit (BCU).	Use INTERPOL to pass a next of kin compassionate message request to the country in question.
• UK national in the UK • Next of kin is overseas • Under investigation or homicide • Death or serious injury	Senior Investigating Officer (SIO).	Use INTERPOL to pass a next of kin compassionate message request to the country in question.

Useful links

Lists of foreign embassies, high commissions and consulates in the UK, with email, web site and phone contact details.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassies-in-the-uk>

UK government guide on what to do when someone dies abroad

<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/death-abroad>

2020 Memorandum of Understanding on Murder, Manslaughter and Infanticide of British Nationals Abroad

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/MoU-with-the-Foreign-Commonwealth-and-Development-Office-and-National-Police-Chiefs-Council.pdf>