

National and international arrangements

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 7 February 2025

Written by College of Policing

6 mins read

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) has a worldwide network of embassies and consulates, employing over 17,000 people in 179 countries and territories, across our diplomatic and development offices worldwide, which consists of over 280 officially designated Posts. The FCDO works with international organisations to promote UK interests and global security including:

- the EU
- NATO
- the United Nations
- the UN Security Council
- the Commonwealth

One of the responsibilities of the FCDO is to support British nationals around the world through consular services.

The FCDO assists all British nationals abroad, including:

- British overseas citizens
- British nationals (overseas)
- British subjects
- British protected persons

It may also provide assistance to citizens of Commonwealth nations and the Ireland where their own country does not have diplomatic representation.

Crisis management department

In the event of a crisis overseas, the crisis management department (CMD) within the FCDO takes the lead. The CMD will decide the best way to provide effective and timely consular assistance to British nationals affected by the crisis.

The CMD can expand into an **FCDO** emergency response team. This team can open up a facility for the public to telephone the FCDO with relevant concerns regarding the crisis. The CCG can also send a rapid deployment team (RDT) to the country or area affected by the crisis with details being recorded on ORBIT (FCDO case management system). The CMD can also send a rapid deployment team (RDT) to the country or area affected by the crisis. The RDT will support the work of consular staff in situ. Following a mass fatality incident, national disaster victim identification(DVI) assessors may deploy alongside the RDT.

If the crisis results from a terrorist incident, hostage taking or kidnapping, the FCDO Counter Terrorism Policy Department takes the lead.

UK disaster victim identification

The **national disaster victim identification** (UK DVI) unit is a small national policing unit funded by the Home Office and FCDO, with responsibility to coordinate the national DVI capability. The unit works to ensure that there is a national capability to deal with mass fatality incidents at home. If requested by the government, it will also respond to mass fatality incidents that occur outside the UK. This is usually where it is suspected that British citizens may be involved.

The unit sits alongside the **National Police Coordination Centre** (NPoCC). The role of NPoCC is to coordinate the provision of all police mutual aid (except counter terrorism assets) in response to requests from forces. It provides advice and guidance to ensure national consistency. The NPoCC also plays a role in coordinating the policing response to pre-planned and dynamic events that require input from multiple forces, for example, coordinating the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NPoCC operates a 24/7 service and carries out work such as:

- assessing national capacity and contribution in relation to the strategic policing requirement and national policing requirement
- establishing and coordinating continuous testing and exercising regimes to ensure effective capability and mobilisation of national assets when required

- facilitating mutual aid in a steady state and provides a fit-for-purpose coordination facility in times of crisis
- ensuring effective reporting mechanisms with the Home Office and central government crisis management structures

NPoCC works closely with [**UK DVI**](#) and supports the unit where national or international mutual aid is required.

- See also the [**mobilisation APP**](#).

Police regions

Each UK police force has its own DVI capability and each of the police regions across the UK has a regionally coordinated capability. The capability from across the police regions, including cadres of trained police officers and police forensic staff, form the police national DVI capability.

The nine police regions that cover England, Wales and Northern Ireland contribute to an [**FCDO**](#) on-call rota. Each region in turn is on call for a five-week period to supply operational support when requested to the FCDO in the event of a crisis involving UK citizens overseas.

The police regions receive a specific briefing prior to their FCDO on-call period. They are required to have in place a designated chief officer as gold commander, a senior identification manager (SIM), a senior investigating officer (SIO) and the capability to activate the casualty bureau (CB) if requested by policing managers. The region may also be required to embed liaison officers within the FCDO.

While Police Scotland does not take part in the FCDO on-call arrangements, police resources for mutual aid can be requested from Police Scotland. Police Scotland will also assist with enquiries in relation to persons normally resident in Scotland. Police Scotland is represented at all national steering group meetings and working groups in relation to DVI.

Forensic specialists

The National DVI Unit also coordinates a cadre of forensic specialists from across the UK who are not normally employed by the police. These specialists have appropriate skills and have volunteered to be part of the national DVI capability. They include:

- forensic odontologists
- forensic pathologists
- forensic anthropologists
- radiographers
- anatomical pathology technologists (APTs)

Other forensic specialists are sourced through existing forensic provider contractors to the police service. Collectively, the police and wider forensic capability is referred to as UK DVI.

Any mass fatality incident – whether the result of a criminal act, negligence, accident or natural disaster – will require a major missing person investigation.

Activating specific investigative elements

The FCDO may request via UK DVI that only some of the investigative elements are activated in response to an incident and via existing MoU arrangements. This may occur, for example, in cases where a smaller number of fatalities have occurred or where the authorities within the country concerned have the confidence of the FCDO and UK DVI. Under these circumstances, there may be a request for only gathering Ante Mortem information and forensic material to assist identification. Gathering Ante Mortem material would typically be performed by family liaison officers (FLOs) under the direction of the senior identification manager (SIM).

However, if human remains are repatriated to England or Wales, there may be an inquest requiring competent presentation of evidence.

The national policing lead for DVI may direct that a specified police force or region, rather than the on-call police region, should provide support to an incident. This may occur when an early assessment identifies that the victims of an incident involving fatalities are predominantly from a specific place in the UK. Reasonable costs are recoverable by the police from the FCDO. This is detailed in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the FCDO.

UK DVI can also support humanitarian assistance or advice to another country when requested by the government, bilaterally or via INTERPOL.

Mass fatalities and non-UK nationals

A mass fatality incident occurring in the UK may involve nationals from outside the UK. Many other countries that are members of **INTERPOL** have DVI response capabilities. Requests are likely to be received by the UK government for deploying foreign national DVI teams in support of the UK response. Foreign national DVI responders will also be concerned with repatriating the deceased to their home country.

All requests for deploying DVI teams into the UK should be referred to the FCDO. The UK government determines whether any request is appropriate.

The UK DVI national coordinator should liaise with INTERPOL about the scale and nature of the requested deployments.

- See **mobilisation APP** for further information.

Tags

Civil emergencies