



# Consular Assistance for Citizens in Distress: A Comparison of National Policies of EU Member States, Switzerland and the UK

(Excluding Ad Hoc Measures/Policies Implemented in Response to the Covid-19 Crisis)



## Disclaimer

The information presented in this document was collected in the framework of the Research Project “Migration and Transnational Social Protection in (Post) Crisis Europe (MiTSoPro)” that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant agreement No. 680014). It is based on a survey with national experts who analyzed the legislation in place on 1st January 2019 in each country. The full list of country experts is available here: <http://labos.ulg.ac.be/socialprotection/experts-eu/> (see diaspora experts).

This data is still in the process of peer-review. This document is therefore purely informative and is not intended to provide a base for legal action or claim towards public authorities. Readers who wish to be informed about possible responses to their specific difficulties are invited to contact consular authorities (see links below), as they can provide official and updated information. Please note that some states have different policies for nationals abroad depending on whether their stay is temporary (e.g., tourist) or permanent.

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# Austria

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Seriously ill Austrians abroad who are no longer able to provide for themselves can be repatriated and brought into a hospital in Austria (if there are no relatives who can help them). Applications need to be made with the relevant Austrian representation abroad. Financial support for repatriation and/or placement in hospital is decided upon on an individual basis, taking insurance, assets, income and relatives into account. Support does not necessarily have to be repaid.

Austrians abroad who find themselves in serious difficulties can apply via the respective Austrian representation to the Fund for the Support of Austrian Citizens Abroad. It can be paid once or periodically depending upon whether the person faces a temporary emergency or permanent financial hardship. The assistance is only paid if the person does not have enough income or assets, nor financial support from relatives. There is no obligation for reimbursement.

[Link](#)

Country expert: Anita Heindelmaier

# Belgium

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

In a crisis situation when an important number of citizens are potentially involved, the Crisis Centre of the Foreign Affairs Ministry can organize repatriation. Outside of a crises period, the General Direction of Consular Affairs can organize the repatriation of an individual only in exceptional cases after the person has used all possible resources to resolve the problem by her/himself. In that case, the service can organize the repatriation but the individual has to commit to reimburse the cost incurred.

Consulates can provide financial assistance to a citizen in distress. This support often takes the form of a financial advance when immediate costs have to be dealt with. This financial support is exceptional and is only provided when there is no alternative (i.e., from friends, family, etc.). The beneficiary is asked to reimburse this financial assistance.

[Link](#)

Country expert: Jérémy Mandin

# Bulgaria

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Bulgaria does not offer repatriation but can assist individuals in connecting with relatives who can help. If a person is homeless abroad and does not have a home or relatives in Bulgaria, authorities can help find a suitable NGO and facilitate assistance of local social workers.

The official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stresses that it does not provide any financial support in case of hardship.

[Link](#)

Country expert: Zvezda Vankova

# Croatia

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Article 14b of the Law on Foreign Affairs provides that diplomatic missions and consular offices can provide assistance to Croatian citizens who find themselves in distress abroad, by facilitating their return to Croatia. Such assistance can include advice to return to Croatia using citizens' own financial means; or assistance in obtaining the necessary funds from their own or other sources.

In exceptional circumstances, when the delay of the citizen's return may cause serious consequences and there is no other option of providing means for return, the Head of the diplomatic mission or Consular Office may, upon written request and identification (passport, ID), approve the granting of a loan (cash advance or payment to an account) and determine the manner of its expense (transportation, stay, various costs). A written and signed commitment to repay the borrowed funds upon return to Croatia (including compensation for provided services, repatriation and urgent issuance of documentation) is required. The Secretary General of the Ministry may make a decision on the partial or total release of the obligation to repay the loan.

See column on the left for information on loans.

[Link](#)

# Cyprus

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	In crisis situations such as revolutionary uprisings, civil wars, riots, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes or terrorist attacks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will make efforts to locate Cypriot nationals in order to handle their requests for medical assistance, evacuation or repatriation (further information: <a href="#">Link</a> ).	Cypriot consular services can offer financial assistance to Cypriots abroad if a family member deposits the same amount of money as a guarantee on the account of the Accounting Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In special/dire cases, a small financial aid can be granted to Cypriot citizens against the promise of future reimbursement (further information: <a href="#">link</a> ).	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country expert: Angeliki Konstantinidou

# Czechia

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	<p>Act. No. 150/2017 on foreign service indicates that repatriation is usually used in reaction to specific individual crisis situations (accident, death, being the victim of a crime etc.), political circumstances and natural disasters. Representative authorities provide necessary information to nationals abroad or their relatives, issue necessary documents, and may facilitate contact with the relevant institutions (courts, hospitals, insurance companies etc.) in the home and host countries. Financial help is not provided. In exceptional circumstances, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranges collective evacuations of Czech nationals (e.g., from Libya in 2011, from Lebanon in 2006, from Ukraine in 2015) or resettlement programmes, based on government resolutions reacting to specific political situations or natural disasters.</p>	<p>Act. No. 150/2017 on foreign service indicates that authorities can provide adequate financial or material support, if this is indispensable and cannot be obtained by other means. Beneficiaries have to commit to cover the costs of consular protection. This obligation can be waived in exceptional circumstances.</p>	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country experts: Eva Janska and Kristýna Janurová

# Denmark

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

In cases of accidents abroad, consulates can help with contacting insurance companies or family members, and with finding a hospital. They do not pay for hospital stays, repatriation or any other costs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a Crisis Center, which becomes active if a natural or man-made crisis occurs. According to the MFA website, this center provides an overview of the extent of disaster, provides support to embassy or consular staff, establishes communication and other technical infrastructure, searches for Danes abroad and assists them, and cooperates with local and international authorities. No publicly available information provides details as to repatriation in such cases.

As a rule, cash assistance is not offered by Danish representations abroad. In exceptional cases, money can be lent, against a signed document and guarantees for repayment.

[Link](#)

Country expert: Romana Careja



# Estonia

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

According to the Consular law, consular authorities can help Estonian citizens or aliens who are in a state of emergency in the event of an accident or illness, are victims of a crime or are in any other circumstance and not in a position to leave the situation (no other specific conditions mentioned). Consular authorities can also advise and assist nationals in the Consular Area by contacting the family or other relatives, facilitating return to Estonia, protecting the rights of citizens abroad, and arranging for hospital treatment or other essential necessities. If financial assistance is provided, it must be repaid to the state within 90 days.

Consular authorities can provide financial assistance on the basis of a written application by the citizen in need, who provides a collateral. In the absence of a collateral, a consular officer may provide financial assistance in agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Financial assistance granted without a guarantee has to be repaid to the state within 90 days.

[Link](#)

Country expert: Maarja Saar

# Finland

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Consulate service law 498/1999 12 § 3 indicates that consulates provide information and assist Finnish nationals in health- and invalidity-related emergencies by getting in contact with their next of kin or other relevant people, helping them access healthcare, helping them return to Finland (no further details provided), getting legal help, reporting a crime, and other necessary tasks. Consulates can also help with getting access to cash from Finland in cases of emergency.

Finnish consulates can help with a) a small grant to respond to immediate distress; b) a home-away allowance (against a repayment commitment if a deposit is not possible); c) borrowing money for travelling home; or d) loaning money to pay for necessary and temporary care for illness in the case that a Finn cannot obtain a deposit. Consulates may still help a Finn economically when s/he cannot repay a loan due to the severity of her/his illness, or another comparable cause (Act of Consular services 1999)

[Link](#)

Country expert: Maili Malin

# France

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Repatriation and assistance to French citizens abroad in the event of death, illness, or hardship is available under "extraordinary circumstances". The state can organize the repatriation and pay related expenses but the beneficiary's family is expected to reimburse the totality of those expenses. Those circumstances may include cases of French citizens abroad facing economic hardship, though the lack of clear criteria in the legislation leaves the relevant consular authorities with significant discretionary powers in assessing individual cases. Once they are declared eligible for repatriation, individuals are then directed by authorities towards associations in France, which may cater to their particular needs. Upon their return in France and provided they meet the general eligibility requirements, they may be entitled to a provisional shelter, a medical assistance, and/or the Humanitarian State Medical Aid (i.e. *Aide Médicale de l'État Humanitaire*, a universal health coverage for persons who are not affiliated to the general regime).

The following cash schemes are available to French citizens abroad: 1) *Secours occasionnels*: discretionary coverage of expenses to French citizens facing exceptional circumstances abroad; 2) *Aides exceptionnelles*: cash payments exceptionally made to French citizens who are not registered with the consulate or are prisoners in a foreign country; 3) *Allocation de solidarité en faveur des personnes âgées (AS)*: for persons above 65 years of age who meet certain economic conditions; 4) *Allocation pour les adultes handicapés et aides complémentaires (AAH)*: monthly cash payment to French citizens with a disability who meet certain income requirements; 5) *Allocation pour les enfants handicapés et aides complémentaires (AEH)*: monthly cash payment to the caregiver of a child with a disability who meets certain income requirements; 6) *Allocation à durée déterminée (ADD)*: time-limited financial assistance to French persons abroad who meet certain income requirements and are 'in distress'; 7) *Secours mensuels spécifiques enfants (SMSE)*: extraordinary payments to children 'in distress'.

[Link](#)

# Germany

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	§ 5 Konsulargesetz (Consular Act) specifies that in strictly defined individual cases, if it is advisable, a consular officer may enable an individual's return to his/her place of habitual residence, or to another place. Any such costs are to be reimbursed.	§ 5 Konsulargesetz (Consular Act) specifies that in strictly defined individual cases, if it is advisable, a consular officer may offer financial assistance. Any such costs are to be reimbursed. Open hotel or hospital costs, or fines, will not be paid. If an emergency situation continues for more than two months, and it is not possible for them to return to Germany (possible grounds are: raising a child which cannot leave the country for legal reasons; lengthy hospitalization; state authority), then Book 12 of the Social Code shall be applied (§ 24; Germans abroad shall not receive social assistance except in cases where it is not possible to return to Germany; they would normally be expected to return to Germany to receive assistance). Assistance will not be given if it would normally be expected from the country of residence.	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country expert: Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels

# Greece

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	<p>No specific, permanent repatriation policy exists, although some evacuations have been organized in cases of natural disasters or war outbreaks. Greek consular authorities usually establish contacts with next-of-kin in other cases of emergency. The only recent case of mass-scale repatriation was the Lebanon 2006 crisis where 439 Greek citizens and 2217 other EU citizens were evacuated at no cost.</p> <p>In cases of a serious illness or accident, consular authorities inform next-of-kin, arrange visits and provide information on existing services to the Greek citizens affected. A medical evacuation is predicated upon the consent of national authorities in Greece as well as the existence of financial resources - it is not stipulated whether, how much and when the person in need has to pay for a medical evacuation.</p>	<p>There is no official or discretionary policy of handing out cash loans to Greek citizens living abroad who are in distress.</p>	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country experts: Michalis Moutselos and Georgia Mavrodi

# Hungary

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Act XLVI of 2001 on Consular Protection does not differentiate between nationals temporarily or permanently residing abroad. The law on consular protection refers to the consul's responsibility to help Hungarian citizens abroad in danger to return to Hungary. The consul helps and supports the repatriation process of a citizen in need by: providing a new passport, if needed; providing advice for the return journey; providing assistance to secure the amount needed for the return journey; and providing a consular loan to facilitate a prompt return journey if the citizen is in a critical financial situation (in exceptional cases, due to the social-financial situation of the citizen, the consular loan may not be repaid or may be repaid only partially). In case of natural disasters, war or armed conflict, consulates take measures to inform and enquire about Hungarian citizens affected and continuously evaluate the situation. If necessary, the consul may suggest to the government the evacuation of nationals.

There is no cash benefit policy for nationals residing abroad. Cash benefits offered by consulates are only applicable to emergency situations, under strict conditions and, most frequently, the consular loan must be returned. In exceptional cases, due to the social-financial situation of the citizen, the consular loan may not have to be repaid or may be repaid only partially; it is the discretionary decision of the consulate.

[Link](#)

# Ireland

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	In very exceptional circumstances where the health or security of an Irish citizen abroad is at risk, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade may agree to repatriate the person to Ireland. Repatriation in this instance is subject to strict conditions, which are set out in each individual case (no guidelines available). The conditions include a written undertaking to repay all the expenses incurred as well as a statutory fee for this service.	The Consular Assistance Charter specifically states that there is no budget for Consulates to give any sort of financial aid for medical, legal or other expenses ( <a href="#">Link</a> ).	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country expert: Mary J. Hickman

# Italy

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Presidential Decree of January 5, 1967, n. 200 indicates that in case of health-related economic hardship, Italians residing abroad in a state of "documented indigence" can contact their consulate to benefit from a "consular repatriation" at the expense of the Treasury Department. This concerns only Italian citizens who are experiencing issues that cannot be resolved locally in the host country. Abandoned minors can also be repatriated. The consular repatriation is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the competent local authorities (prefectures, police, municipalities, local health departments, social services, etc.). Repatriation procedures at the expense of the Treasury Department are limited to cases of proven financial hardship, as verified by the diplomatic offices; in all other instances, repatriation can occur subject to the grant of a loan that must be repaid. The consular repatriation requires, by the Consulate, the assessment of the actual state of poverty and the availability of family or social services (e.g. retirement homes) in Italy willing to welcome the citizen upon his/her return. A medical repatriation is provided to Italian citizens that fall medically ill only in the following cases: life-threatening situations in which transport is impossible and cannot be arranged locally; for surgeries that must be performed in very specific time frames (i.e. a transplant).

An Italian citizen residing abroad can address the Social Services Office of his/her Consulate to receive exceptional temporary assistance (*Assistenza e sussidi a favore dei connazionali indigenti residenti all'estero*), which may include: a "food parcel"; an absolutely exceptional cash aid, determined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; a loan, due to unexpected economic difficulties and the impossibility of using the help of family members or third parties; consular repatriation, to be paid by the Treasury. The Conditions to access such assistance are: holding the Italian citizenship, a documented state of indigence, and registration with the Register of citizens abroad (AIRE). Subsidies are primarily aimed at poor citizens who are not entitled to social benefits, either from the country of origin or the country of residence. Only cash loans are to be repaid.

[Link](#)



# Latvia

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	<p>No publicly available information was found on repatriation of nationals in case of emergency.</p> <p>NB: In the Latvian context, repatriation is also frequently understood as help to return for those, mainly ethnic Latvians, who left the country before the 1990s during the USSR.</p>	<p>For citizens temporarily abroad who face a medical emergency, Latvian authorities indicate that no dedicated budget exists in this situation (further information: <a href="#">link</a>).</p>	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country expert: Aija Lulle

# Lithuania

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

The Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 618 on the Approval of the Procedure of the Provision and Return of the State Material Support to Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania in Cases of Hardship states that embassies and consulates are authorized to provide material support to victims of crimes and in cases of accidents or illness for the purposes of covering expenses for necessary medical aid, travel to Lithuania, and accommodation. The support is not provided in the form of cash benefits, but transferred to the providers of services. Financial assistance must be reimbursed within three months after its issuance.

NB. In the Lithuanian context, repatriation is frequently understood as the repatriation of Lithuanians who had, during the period of the Soviet Union, been forced to move to other territories in the USSR. Measures of social support to these persons include housing, compensation of the costs of travel and social integration.

See column on the left for details.

[Link](#)

# Luxembourg

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Assistance is discretionary and based on *ad-hoc* decisions depending on specific circumstances and the degree of vulnerability of the concerned national(s). Consulates have no legal obligation to repatriate Luxembourg nationals. However, in exceptional circumstances (accident or serious illness, death, natural disaster, terrorist attack, epidemic, political tensions) in a country where Luxembourg is represented by a diplomatic/consular mission, the latter - or the Directorate of Consular Affairs and International Cultural Relations - can organise repatriation. The consulates or the Directorate do not cover the expenses. However, on a discretionary basis and in exceptional circumstances, they can advance the money if a sufficient guarantee of reimbursement has been provided by the beneficiary or her/his family.

Consular assistance is discretionary and based on *ad-hoc* decisions depending on specific circumstances and degree of vulnerability of the concerned national(s). The Directorate of consular affairs and international cultural relations, in collaboration with its diplomatic and consular posts, has for mission to assist Luxembourg nationals who find themselves in difficulty or even distress abroad: death of a relative, serious illness, accident, theft of documents, detention, major public health or security issue are clearly mentioned in various texts. They will contact the family of the national in question to pass on the information, assist the national and his/her family with local procedures, collect the money sent by the relatives to pay the repatriation or the treatment, etc. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentions that under no circumstances the Directorate or the diplomatic/consular mission will pay for hospitalisation, repatriation, or medicine.

[Link](#)

# Luxembourg

## (Continued)

Contact details of consulates	Repatriation policy (general policy)	Availability of financial help (general policy)	Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis
<p>In consequence of major natural disasters, epidemics and terrorist attacks, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs has decided to create a specific webpage "<a href="#">LamA - Lëtzebuurger am Ausland</a>" (Luxembourger abroad). Luxembourg nationals (travellers or persons living permanently abroad) and the persons who are accompanying them can declare their stay abroad. By reporting their trips or residence abroad to the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Luxembourg may be more responsive in case of major events requesting assistance and/or repatriation of nationals.</p>	<p>However, on a discretionary basis and in exceptional circumstances, they can advance the money if a sufficient guarantee of reimbursement has been provided by the beneficiary or her/his family.</p>	<p>NB. In countries in which Luxembourg is not represented, Luxembourg nationals may turn to Belgian diplomatic/consular missions if so required, in accordance with the 1965 Convention with Belgium on consular cooperation (in addition to their right to seek help from the embassy or consulate of any other EU Member State if they find themselves outside the EU with no consulate from their own Member State).</p>	

Country expert: Natalie Perrin

# Malta

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	There are no specific repatriation policies in place, however consulate or embassy officials in the host country may assist in organizing arrangements and acting as a liaison between the citizen and the authorities (no further information available).	No cash benefits are provided by the Maltese Government to nationals residing abroad.	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country experts: Hillary Briffa and Alessandra Baldacchino

# The Netherlands

<b>Contact details of consulates</b>	<b>Repatriation policy (general policy)</b>	<b>Availability of financial help (general policy)</b>	<b>Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis</b>
<a href="#">Link</a>	<p>Consular assistance in the Netherlands is based on policy and not a legal right. Therefore, the Netherlands is under no legal obligation to provide consular assistance. Assistance can only be provided <i>ratione personae</i>. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was partly responsible for the repatriation of the victims' remains and personal belongings of Dutch nationals who lost their lives in the MH17 crash in 2014. This example shows that in exceptional cases of emergency, the Dutch government is willing to provide consular assistance.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not offer financial support. Financial advances are rarely given, and only if the Dutch national abroad signs a declaration in which he/she promises to repay the advance loan.</p> <p>For nationals who have been admitted to hospital but are not insured for medical treatment in a foreign country, the embassy can ask the family in the Netherlands to transfer money.</p>	<a href="#">Link</a>

Country experts: Joost Jansen and Robbert Goverts

# Poland

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

According to the Ordinance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of 18 December 2015 on financial assistance provided by the consul of the Republic of Poland, the consul may, upon request, provide a Polish citizen staying in the consular district with financial assistance to cover necessary expenses to return to Poland. This is the only financial support suggested by the law. It is accessible to Polish citizens living inside and outside the EU and its amount is not fixed. There is an obligation to reimburse after return (the applicant must submit a declaration of commitment to return all or part of the amount received on the date indicated by the consul).

NB. Poland also has specific repatriation policies for Polish individuals residing in former USSR countries.

Article 48 of the Consular Law of June 25th 2015 indicates that, in justified cases, the consul may grant aid to Polish citizens living in a consular district who are in need of assistance and unable to receive it from other sources. Payments may be granted to meet basic living needs, in particular, to purchase necessary medicines, food, clothing, or school aid, or to pay for necessary care if the person concerned is in a documented difficult situation. The service is offered to both nationals residing inside and outside the EU. The financial assistance can be recurrent, but it is generally non-recurrent. There is no obligation for the national or her/his family to reimburse it.

In the event of an accident or serious illness, consuls can notify the family, visit the hospital, provide information and/or cooperate with the insurance company.

[Link](#)

# Portugal

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

In accordance with the Decree-Law 162/2006, the repatriation of Portuguese citizens can occur when citizens lack the necessary means to support return costs due to life-threatening medical situations where local treatment is impossible and in cases of expulsion. Each one of these situations is evaluated by the consular section. Except in cases of expulsion, repatriation only takes place by the express will of the repatriating citizens or their representatives. The repatriated Portuguese national should have the means to reimburse the State the amounts spent in the repatriation process, and shall make a reimbursement commitment in a written declaration. In recent years, the main reasons for repatriation have been accidents, weather conditions (e.g., Hurricane Irma in 2017), irregular presence in host country (e.g., in Canada or the USA), and political and economic instability in host countries (e.g., Venezuela).

In the case of an accident, consulates shall provide assistance equivalent to the support received in Portugal, seeking to ensure the necessary medical assistance and taking all other measures appropriate to the situation. Citizens who have received help from the consulates and which have the means to reimburse the State have to sign a written declaration stating their commitment of reimbursement. The law does not give any further indications on the conditions to which this assistance is made and on the situations that allow a citizen to seek help from the consulates.

[Link](#)



# Portugal

(Continued)

Contact details of consulates	Repatriation policy (general policy)	Availability of financial help (general policy)	Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis
	<p>In case of economic hardship, consulates can promote repatriation to Portugal in exceptional circumstances and proven economic failure. Repatriation is only possible when other means to overcome the economic hardship of the citizen abroad are not possible and after signing an agreement for reimbursement to the Portuguese State.</p>		

Country experts: José Carlos Marques and Pedro Góis

# Romania

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Law no.198/2008 on Charged Consular Services and the Handling of Fees levied by Diplomatic Missions and Consular Posts of Romania Abroad indicates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is able to make full use of the collected extra fees for the consular services urgently rendered in the following situations: payment of transport costs for Romanian citizens in special situations and without financial resources and of children without a legal guardian including the payment of transport, accommodation and daily allowance expenditures for the persons accompanying them, where assisted repatriation is required. It also allows for the payment of the repatriation expenses for the bodies of Romanian citizens deceased abroad when the family cannot bear the repatriation costs.

These payments are now mostly covered from the state budget. In practice, repatriation costs are covered by the consular offices or embassies, only in exceptional cases, and require prior ministerial approval.

See the column on the left for details.

[Link](#)

# Slovakia

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

There is no general policy that legally binds the consulates to offer repatriation services to nationals residing abroad. In spite of this, some consulates, on a discretionary basis, do offer medical help in exceptional medical circumstances, repatriate nationals in countries affected by natural disasters, or in exceptional circumstances.

In cases of natural disasters, war or violent/armed conflicts, consulates also take measures to inform and enquire about Slovak citizens affected and continuously evaluate the situation.

There is no general policy by which consulates offer specific cash benefits but the Act of Foreign Service No 151/2010 defines the consular services accessible to nationals abroad who finds themselves in situation of danger. Services include providing loans to nationals abroad (only in cases of emergency) or financing transportation back to Slovakia (no further details available)

[Link](#)

Country experts: Michal Vašečka and Viera Žúborová

# Slovenia

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Slovenia has a repatriation policy for Slovenian citizens in emergency situations, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, situations of political unrest, or serious economic crises. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines what the crisis situation is and can recommend to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to back its motion for repatriation. In case the Government confirms the motion, all costs of repatriation are covered from the national budget and do not need to be reimbursed.

NB. Slovenia also has a special repatriation policy for Slovenian minorities who do not hold citizenship.

In cases of extreme urgency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may offer distressed nationals of the Republic of Slovenia a financial advance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall earmark these funds in its budget. After their return to the Republic of Slovenia, nationals must repay the financial advance to the Ministry, or to the diplomatic mission or consular post of the Republic of Slovenia in the country of residence in the case they live abroad. A situation of extreme urgency shall be a situation where an individual has no one who could provide him/her, either through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or in some other way, with funds for fundamental necessities or return to the country of origin.

[Link](#)

Country experts: Mojca Vah Jevšnik and Sanja Cukut Krilić

# Spain

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

Order AEX/1059/2002 on the Regulations for Consular Protection and Assistance Abroad indicates that repatriations are part of the mission of consulates. The conditions of access vary depending on the modality, but all include the applicant's lack of resources. The benefit ought to be reimbursed but, in case of economic hardship, the Spanish government can cover totally or partially the expenses derived from the repatriation. The service is offered to nationals residing either inside or outside the EU.

Order AEX/1059/2002 on the Regulations for Consular Protection and Assistance Abroad indicates that the Minister of Foreign Affairs may provide several types of assistance: repatriations, evacuations, subsistence, allowances in case of extraordinary emergencies (e.g. being a victim of illicit acts, robberies or accidents), allowances for Spaniards incarcerated abroad, allowances for legal aid and allowances for burial and cremation. Aid provided under this framework is reimbursable. The conditions of access vary depending on the modality, but all include the applicant's lack of resources. Aid is not recurrent and the amount varies depending on the modality and applicant's situation (the amount can range from 100 € to 30000€).

[Link](#)

Country expert: Pau Palop García

# Sweden

## Contact details of consulates

## Repatriation policy (general policy)

## Availability of financial help (general policy)

## Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

The Swedish Codes of Statutes 2003:491 (The Law of Consular Aid) indicates that consulates can authorize a "reasonable" amount of cash to cover costs directly related to a specific situation. This includes repatriation in cases of health emergency if all other avenues have been exhausted and if there is an acute need for the individual. The individual or another person will be liable to reimburse the state. This protection is most often used for citizens outside the EU. This law mostly covers cases when care is completely unavailable or inadequate.

Swedish consulates do not, as a rule, offer economic assistance to their citizens abroad except for extremely short term situations (for example, a loan to facilitate travel home to Sweden or for life-sustaining care). In these cases, assistance is provided only when all other options are exhausted and the emergency was both unforeseen and reasonable precautions had been taken. No specific amount is specified, but the law on economic assistance simply mentions that the amount must be reasonable. The fee for such a loan is 600kr, and the full loan plus the fee is to be repaid within a month by the beneficiary, or by individuals whom the beneficiary used as a reference.

[Link](#)

Country experts: André Olsson Nyhammar and Erik Olsson

# Switzerland

## (Non-EU)

### Contact details of consulates

### Repatriation policy (general policy)

### Availability of financial help (general policy)

### Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

The 2014 Federal Act on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad grants assistance to Swiss abroad who are in need upon application through the competent representation. This policy allows for a cash advance in the case of a financial emergency, or financial assistance for repatriation. Any Swiss citizen living abroad who is in financial difficulties abroad, which cannot be resolved in any other way, can turn to the closest Swiss representation (embassy, consulate general or consulate). Repatriation may be requested by the person or suggested by the representation. The cost of repatriation can be covered by the consulate in agreement with the Consular Directorate in Bern.

Aid recipients must repay assistance if they no longer require them and are able to support themselves and their families. Assistance may be claimed back up to ten years after the last payment.

In urgent cases, the representation grants the essential emergency aid and notifies the Consular Directorate, which may authorize representations to grant additional assistance on their own initiative.

See the column on the left for further details.

[Link](#)

# UK

## (Policy prior to Brexit)

### Contact details of consulates

### Repatriation policy (general policy)

### Availability of financial help (general policy)

### Additional information on consular response to COVID-19 crisis

[Link](#)

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) is not funded to provide emergency financial assistance, and the Consular Act 1968 does not specify any obligation to provide financial assistance in emergencies. However, as stipulated by FCO policy in the customer charter 'Support for British nationals abroad: A guide' the FCO may be able to provide an emergency loan to help a Briton return to the UK. However, this is discretionary, only considered in exceptional circumstances and only if all other methods have been exhausted. If eligible, the Briton must sign a 'undertaking to repay' agreement where they agree to repay the loan. The loan will be secured by giving up their passport to FCO staff. However, there have been exceptional cases where the UK government has repatriated Britons. For example, in October 2017 the government (Department of Transport NOT FCO/consulates) ordered the country's biggest peacetime repatriation to fly 110,000 Britons to the UK following collapse of the airline Monarch ([Link](#))

In addition, the FCO operates Exceptional Assistance Measures, which provide additional practical support to all British nationals (tourists and emigrants) affected by terrorist attacks overseas, and their families.

As indicated in the column on the left, an emergency loan can be provided in exceptional circumstances.

[Link](#)