

Bereavement information for Bulgaria
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Bereavement Information for Bulgaria

<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/bulgaria>

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Introduction

The death of a relative or a friend can be a traumatic experience. When a death occurs overseas, family and friends in the UK can feel additional distress as they are unfamiliar with foreign procedures and perhaps are unable to communicate in the language of the country where the death occurred. The Consular team at the British Embassy in Sofia are ready to help if you need our assistance. Please call us on [+359 2 933 9222](tel:+35929339222).

You may be uncertain about what to do next or who to contact for advice. These notes are designed to help you through the practical arrangements you will need to make. You should be aware that Bulgarian procedures differ significantly to those in the United Kingdom and that, while we understand your need for arrangements to be made quickly, this is not always possible.

Besides help and support to families who have lost a loved one we can also provide advice how to raise concerns with the local authorities if there are suspicious or unclear circumstances surrounding a death in Bulgaria. However, if you have concerns about the circumstances surrounding a death, we suggest that you seek professional legal advice.

What we can do to help

- Keep the next of kin informed, and try to ensure you don't feel that you are on your own
- Offer advice on local procedures (e.g. local funeral or repatriation)
- Provide a list of local funeral directors
- Advise you on how to apply to register the death with the UK authorities

What we cannot do

- Investigate an alleged crime
- Pay hospital bills
- Pay cremation or repatriation costs
- Pay any outstanding debts
- Offer legal advice
- Store or send back to the UK the deceased's personal belongings
- Negotiate with insurance companies

What you can do

- Provide us with as much information as possible about the deceased:
 - Full name
 - Date of birth
 - Address
 - Passport number
 - A copy of their passport
 - Details of their next of kin (if someone other than yourself)
- Contact the deceased's insurance company
- Obtain a local death certificate

Standard Procedures

Upon discovery of a death you should call your GP or insurance company and the Emergency Services number 112. They will arrange for an ambulance to arrive and doctors to certify the death.

When the death is confirmed the medical ambulance staff will arrange the deceased to be transported to the nearest state hospital with mortuary facilities. The body will then be examined by a forensic doctor who will determine the cause of death and will issue a **Notice of Death**. The Notice of Death is issued at least six hours after the time of death. To issue the notice, the deceased's ID card should be presented.

Based on the Notice of Death a **Death Certificate** will be issued at a later stage. In cases of natural death, the Death Certificate is issued within 48 hours from the time of death. The authorities responsible for issuing Death Certificates vary in different regions. In Sofia the Death Certificate is issued by the Administration Office of the Sofia Central Cemetery ([how to get there](#)). Elsewhere, Death Certificates are usually issued by the local Municipality (Town Hall) or the funeral agency arranging the funeral.

The Death Certificate is initially issued in Bulgarian language. The funeral director arranging the funeral then sends the original copy to the Foreign Ministry for translation and legalisation.

Please note that if there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the death, a police inquest is usually required and the Death Certificate will be issued when the investigation is closed.

Following the death of a British national in Bulgaria, their next of kin, or an appointed representative with a power of attorney, must decide whether to repatriate the deceased to the UK or another location, or carry out a local burial or cremation. If the deceased was covered by travel insurance, it is important for next of kin to contact the insurance company without delay. You should be aware that in some cases the insurer might wish to use its preferred funeral directors. If there is no insurance cover, the cost of repatriation or burial will need to be met by the next of kin. Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor our Consulate in Bulgaria can meet these costs. If the next of kin is in the UK, they will be able to liaise directly with the Consulate dealing with the case, informing them of how they wish to proceed with the burial or cremation, where they wish this to take place and details of who is taking responsibility for the costs involved.

It is important to remember that if the deceased was travelling with a tour operator, they can be a valuable source of assistance and advice.

Funeral Options

Following the death of a British national in Bulgaria, the next of kin, or a formally appointed representative, must decide whether to:

- repatriate the deceased to the UK or another location;
- have a local cremation and the ashes repatriated to the UK or another location;
- have a local burial

All deaths of foreign nationals in Bulgaria are reported to the police so that they can make a decision whether the body can be released for repatriation or burial, or whether further investigation is required. The only exception may be if the death was natural and happened in a hospital). The police report each case to the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior who then pass the information on to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inform the Embassy.

You may begin to make funeral arrangements before a post mortem has taken place. A funeral director should be appointed by the family of the deceased, or if there is no next of kin, friends or companions.

Most hospitals have good links with local funeral directors who can assist with arranging the repatriation of the deceased. If the person has been on a package holiday, the tour operators have the necessary contacts and can assist with arranging repatriation. The Consular Section of the British Embassy can also provide contact details for international funeral directors. The funeral director will, on the family's behalf, find out when the deceased is likely to be released from the mortuary or in the case of police investigation – forensics department. Please note different charges apply in the mortuary facilities around the country.

A local burial or cremation is also possible. Families should be aware that in these circumstances no coroner's inquest will take place in the UK (see the Section on [UK Coroners](#) below for more information).

Documents needed for local burial in Bulgaria

1. Notice of death
2. Passport of the deceased

Documents needed for cremation in Bulgaria

1. Notice of death and Death Certificate
2. Permission for cremation signed by the doctor who has established the death
3. Declaration from the next of kin confirming that they agree to the cremation. In case the next of kin is not in Bulgaria they should authorise someone to make the necessary arrangements on their behalf (i.e. transportation, payments etc.)
4. Relevant certificate (i.e. birth/marriage) showing relationship between the deceased and their next of kin. If the next of kin is no direct heir to the deceased, the next of kin should provide confirmation from all heirs that they agree to the cremation.
5. Passport of the deceased

All UK documents should be legalised and translated in Bulgarian.

If the next of kin is in the UK and the Declaration is signed there, the signature should be witnessed by a Notary public or a solicitor in the UK and the document then translated in Bulgarian by a certified translator/agency.

If there is a will stating the deceased's wish to be cremated, it will only be accepted by the Crematorium if the signature has been witnessed by a Notary public or solicitor. Again, the family of the deceased should appoint someone to make the necessary arrangements for the cremation to

take place. There is only one crematorium in Bulgaria. It is situated in Sofia Central Cemetery ([how to get there](#)).

Inquests

If a death occurs outside of a medical unit and is unexpected, Bulgarian Police will be involved and will usually, but not always, inform the British Embassy.

When a person dies from a sudden, violent, unnatural death or where the cause of death is not known, the Police will alert the Public Prosecutor who usually calls in a duty doctor. The team of the Public Prosecutor, Police and Doctor have a legal duty to establish:

- The manner in which the death arose
- The cause of death
- The particulars needed to register the death
- The identity of the deceased

The Public Prosecutor will write a preliminary post mortem report including details of the incident leading to death and will normally order a post-mortem examination to be carried out.

If the death is considered as a natural death; i.e. deaths occurring at medical units/hospitals, or where a doctor is able to certify the cause of death because the patient is known to the doctor and has had a long-standing illness, the Police are unlikely to be involved and no further inquest is usually required.

If the death has occurred in suspicious circumstances the Bulgarian police, on behalf of the Public Prosecutor, will investigate. As well as examining the scene of the death, the police and the Public Prosecutor will take statements from witnesses, family and/or friends of the deceased who are present in Bulgaria.

When their investigations are complete, the police send the investigation file to the Prosecutor's office for the attention of the Public Prosecutor in charge. The file normally includes the investigating officer's report, reports from any other officers involved (e.g. road traffic accident investigators), witness statements, and any other relevant evidence such as photographs and/or drawings of the scene of the death.

Next of kin will not automatically receive a copy of the investigation file. However they are entitled to request one. This can be done by making a request whilst giving a statement or by visiting the court to ask for a copy of the file content or through their legal representative. Consular officials cannot act on behalf of next of kin to request a file and public prosecutors would normally refuse to pass a file to a consular official.

Any requests to the police or the prosecution on behalf of the deceased's family should be made either in person or through a legal representative. A [list of English-speaking lawyers and translators](#) is available on our website.

Post Mortem Examination

There are two types of autopsies carried out in Bulgaria:

- a pathological anatomic autopsy which is performed on a person who died in a medical establishment to confirm the cause of death
- a forensic post-mortem which is carried out when there are suspicious circumstances or the cause of death is unclear.

Generally the autopsy report will not automatically be made available to the family. However a copy can be requested from the hospital where the autopsy was carried out.

Pathological anatomic autopsy

This type of autopsy is only performed after a request is made by the family or next of kin. The request should be made to the hospital director.

Forensic post-mortem

A forensic post-mortem is obligatory when there are suspicious circumstances or the cause of death is unclear. Consent is **not** required from the next of kin. It is authorised by the police, the prosecutor's office or a court. A doctor or the family of the deceased can also request a forensic post-mortem.

In order to establish the exact cause of death; the Public Prosecutor may refer the deceased to forensic units to carry out a post mortem which then enables a post mortem report to be issued. Post-mortems are normally carried out within 24 hours of death, or as soon as possible thereafter. However, you should be aware that reporting processes can be slow and the final cause of death may not be known for over six months as some tests e.g. toxicology tests, may be referred to other forensic centres.

When the deceased cannot be buried within 48 hours, measures are taken to preserve the body by performing a partial embalming. Partial embalming is also undertaken when the body has to be transported.

Partial embalming involves removal of the internal organs. Samples of the organs are kept in case further investigation is required. Although the common practice with foreign nationals is that organs are replaced, there is **no requirement** under Bulgarian regulations to do so. However, families can request that organs are replaced.

In the event of brain death, organ donation for transplantation can only take place with the consent of the family/next of kin of the deceased.

Visiting a Mortuary

The police or the Public Prosecutor may ask a family member or friend of the deceased to view the body for identification purposes before a post-mortem takes place. Or, immediate family members

may wish to see the deceased before burial or repatriation takes place. You may ask assistance from the consular officer to help you to arrange a visit to the mortuary.

Mortuary facilities are available in all hospitals. However, storage capacity is limited and conditions may vary. The overall standard of the conditions in Bulgarian state hospitals is significantly lower in comparison to the UK.

UK Coroners

The Coroner in England and Wales is obliged in law to hold an inquest into the cause of any unnatural or violent death of a person whose remains physically lie in his or her area, even if the death occurred overseas and a post-mortem has already been carried out before repatriation of the remains to the UK. In some countries the cause of death is not given on the death certificate and Coroners do not generally have access to judicial files from other countries. Consequently Coroners may order a second post mortem (ie subsequent to the first post mortem carried out abroad), as part of the inquest and it is at this stage that families are made aware that organs have been removed and not replaced.

Coroners can request copies of post-mortem and police reports from the Bulgarian authorities. However, these will only be provided once any judicial proceedings are completed. In some instances this can take many months.

In Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) deals with the investigation of all sudden, suspicious, accidental, unexpected and unexplained deaths which occur in Scotland. However, the COPFS does not have the jurisdiction to investigate deaths that occur outside Scotland apart from in a few limited circumstances. Generally, those circumstances include terrorism, cases where the death may have been caused in Scotland but the person died outside Scotland and cases where the death was as a result of murder or culpable homicide caused by another British citizen or subject.

Coroners in Northern Ireland are not obliged to hold an inquest into cause of death. However, next of kin can apply for a judicial review if no inquest is held.

There will be no Coroner's inquest when the remains are buried or cremated locally.

Stillbirth

When a baby is stillborn in Bulgaria, a Birth Certificate is issued within 48 hours after the birth. The Birth Certificate is issued on the basis of the notice of stillbirth which the hospital director needs to send to the Local Registry within 24 hours after the birth. Based on the information of the Birth Certificate, a Death Certificate is then issued.

If the baby was born alive but passed away before the Birth Certificate was issued, the Death and Birth Certificates will be issued at the same time by the hospital director.

Release of Information

Access to information concerning a death, other than post-mortem and police reports, is restricted. The Bulgarian authorities may not provide this information directly to next of kin, or to third parties including our Consulate.

The Consulate can advise you on how to make requests for post-mortem and police reports. If you have a lawyer, they should be able to assist you in obtaining these. When an investigation in Bulgaria has been opened, the local authorities will normally not release any related reports before the conclusion of the preliminary investigation.

Legal Aid

British nationals who need legal representation in Bulgaria but cannot afford to appoint a lawyer can apply for legal aid. If they are permanently residing in Bulgaria they should contact the [National Legal Aid Bureau](#). The Legal Services Commission in London (<http://gov.uk/check-legal-aid>) is responsible for legal aid applications in the UK.

Victim of crime

If you are a crime victim of the below listed offences, you are entitled to assistance and financial compensation from the state under the crime victim assistance and financial compensation act.

- Terrorism
- Premeditated murder
- Premeditated grievous damage to health
- Trafficking in human beings
- Offences committed by a party contracted by, or in furtherance of a decision of, an organized crime group
- Other serious premeditated offences from which death or grievous bodily injury has ensued as consequences satisfying the elements of a statutory offence

For further information, please check the following links:

http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/F6344A0E-2203-47A8-B8F1-323AF88755F6/0/Postradali_minp_mv_en.pdf

<http://www.compensation.bg/en>

Registration of the death

There is no obligation for an overseas death of a British national to be registered with the British authorities. However, there are two advantages, firstly that a UK-style death certificate is then available, and secondly that a record of the death is then held at the General Register Office for England and Wales in the UK.

To apply please follow the guidance available at <http://www.gov.uk/register-a-death>.

Alternatively you can contact:

Overseas Registration Unit
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
PO Box 6255
Milton Keynes
MK10 1XX

Or email deathregistrationenquiries@fco.gov.uk with specific enquiries.

A registration cannot, in any case, be made without presenting the death certificate issued by the local civil authorities. The death certificate issued by the local authorities will be sufficient for all purposes in the UK.

Notifying the UK Government of the Death: Tell Us Once

Tell Us Once is a service that lets you report a death to most government organisations in one go. Tell Us Once will notify:

- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) – to deal with tax and cancel benefits
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – to cancel benefits, eg income support
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) – to cancel a driving licence
- Passport Office – to cancel a passport
- The local council – to cancel housing benefit, council tax benefit, a Blue Badge, inform council housing services and remove the person from the electoral register

Please visit the following page for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>

Return of Personal Effects

Personal effects are normally returned to friends or relatives who were accompanying the deceased. If the next of kin were not in the country at the time of death the effects cannot be sent by post or courier. The next of kin will have to travel to Bulgaria to collect the deceased's belongings from the local authorities. If there was police investigation, the next of kin can collect the belongings from the investigating police officer. Otherwise, the personal belongings will be kept with the funeral director.

The next of kin will need to provide documentary evidence that they are next of kin. They should be prepared to provide legalised, and translated in Bulgarian, birth and/or marriage certificates as proof of their relationship with the deceased. The [Legalisation Office](#) is the only competent authority to issue legalisation or apostille certificates in the UK. Please find more information about legalisation from the [Legalisation General Guidance Leaflet](#). We recommend next of kin contact a [local qualified lawyer](#) who will be able to advise them on inheritance procedures and regulations.

British Passport Cancellation

In order to avoid identity fraud a deceased person's passport should be sent to the British Embassy in Sofia (*British Embassy Sofia, 9 Moskovska Street, Sofia, Bulgaria*) or passport office in the UK for cancellation along with [form D01](#). Next of kin can request the passport to be returned. Likewise if the passport has been lost or mislaid, relatives should get in contact with either the British Embassy in Sofia or Her Majesty's Passport Office for instructions on reporting the loss of the passport.

Compensation

There could be a state compensation scheme in murder/manslaughter/terrorism cases, but it is not a mandatory arrangement. Any compensation claims on behalf of victims of crime are resolved through a civil court claim. We recommend next of kin contact a [local qualified lawyer](#) who will be able to advise them on applicable compensation schemes.

Language

Please note that the correspondence language for all above processes is Bulgarian. However you have the right to ask an interpreter at the court and the police station.

Link provided below has the list of translators and interpreters in Bulgaria in case you may need to appoint one: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bulgaria-list-of-translators>

List of funeral directors in Bulgaria

The following list of funeral directors has been prepared by the British Embassy Sofia for the convenience of British Nationals who may require this service and assistance in Bulgaria. It is provided on the understanding that we (the British Embassy/Consulate) do not assume or undertake any legal responsibility, to you, or those affected, if you choose to take it into account when instructing a local funeral director.

Alians 2001 Sofia

Address: 15 Evlogi Georgiev Blvd., **Sofia 1000**

Tel.: +359 2 981 7808

Mobile: +359 888 671 072

Email: alians@tradel.net ; elit@tradel.net

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance, Cremation, Repatriation
- they have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover the whole country
- they can offer repayment plans

Balkans International Repatriation LTD

Address: 28 Bratya Mildainovi, **Sofia 1000** ; 2 Ivan Drasov, **Varna 9000**

Tel: +359 700 300 72

Email: info@balkans-international.com

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- specialisations are in International repatriation
- they have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover the whole country
- they can offer repayment plans

Grave Parks Gabrovo

Address: 48 Zelena Livada Street, **Gabrovo 5300**

Tel.: +359 66 800 828

Mobile: +359 889 396 039

Email: hristova_gp@abv.bg

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Gabrovo Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance
- they have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Gabrovo region
- they can offer repayment plans

Grave Parks Petrich

Address: 23 Otets Paisii Street, **Petrich 2850**

Tel: +359 745 60 771 772

Mobile: +359 885 603 493

E-mail: maria_kusimitreva@abv.bg

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Petrich Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance, Transportation
- they do not have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Petrich region
- they can't offer repayment plans

Grave Parks Sevlievo

Address: Municipality, 1 Svoboda Square, **Sevlievo 5400**

Tel.: +359 675 396 155

Mobile: +359 887 895 062

Email: h.baraliev@abv.bg

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Sevlievo Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance
- they do not have experience in representing British nationals

- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Sevlievo region
- they can't offer repayment plans

Funeral Home Ruse

Address: 4 T. Kurdgiev Street, **Ruse 7000**

Tel.: +359 82 825 603

Mobile: +359 888 528 945

Email: odom.ruse@gmail.com

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to City Council Ruse
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance
- they do not have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Ruse region
- they can't offer repayment plans

Funeral Home Varna

Address: 3 Krali Marko Street, **Varna 9000**

Tel.: +359 52 639 383

Mobile: +359 878 303 591

Email: obredi_eood@abv.bg

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Varna Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance, Transportation
- they do not have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Varna region
- they can't offer repayment plans

Funeral Home Veliko Turnovo

Address: Municipality Building, 2 Maika Bulgaria Square, **Veliko Turnovo 5000**

Tel.: +359 62 630 336

Mobile: +359 888 812 177

Email: m_petrov70@abv.bg

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Veliko Turnovo Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance, Transportation
- they have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Veliko Turnovo region
- they can't offer repayment plans

Lanex Group Ltd

Address: Floor 6, 63 Shipchenski Prohod Street, **Sofia 1574**

Tel.: +359 2 974 66 88

Mobile: +359 886 06 69 06

Email: info@lanextranlator.com

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- specialisations are in Funeral Assistance, Repatriation, Transportation, Translation
- they have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover the whole country
- they can't offer repayment plans

Mourning Rituals Plovdiv

Address: 73 Maria Louisa Street, **Plovdiv 4000**

Tel.: +359 32 658 772, +359 32 658 778

Mobile: +359 886 862 004

Email: secretary@traurna-plovdiv.com

This company has told us the following things:

- they have English speaking staff
- they are affiliated to Plovdiv Municipality
- specialisations are in Funeral assistance, Transportation
- they do not have experience in representing British nationals
- staff speak Bulgarian, English
- they cover Plovdiv region
- they can't offer repayment plans