

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.



What is consular assistance?

Under the [1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations](#), States have agreed for other States to establish consular posts on their territory. These consular posts usually take the forms of consulates or embassies representing the interests of their State and nationals in the receiving country.

Their [functions](#) most notably include assisting their nationals in situations of emergencies, such as in conflict or disaster situations or during sanitary crises as the current COVID-19 pandemic.



Did you know?

In international law, consular assistance is referred to as ‘[a right of the State](#)’. This entails that, although nationals have the right to seek assistance, they do not have an entitlement to receive it. Whether or not consular assistance will be provided and the type of assistance ultimately depend on the State itself.

Who can benefit from consular assistance during the COVID-19 crisis?

Consular services are limited to the benefit of nationals abroad. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, consular services are more specifically provided to nationals who are stranded in another country due to the increasing number of [travel restrictions](#) passed by countries and territories to contain the virus.

Hence, consular assistance services are currently focusing on:

- ⇒ [tourists](#); and
- ⇒ [migrants](#), such as students and migrant workers.

Consular assistance does not concern refugees who, by [definition](#), do not benefit from the protection of their country of origin.

What type of assistance is being provided during the COVID-19 crisis?

The consular assistance services vary from one State to the other. In addition to issuing identity and travel documents, consular services [usually](#) offer repatriation assistance to their nationals stranded abroad in two main forms:

- ⇒ [Logistical assistance](#): ranging from information provided to tourists and migrants on how to travel back to their country of origin to their actual repatriation being organized by their country.
- ⇒ [Financial assistance](#): financial help provided by the country of origin for tourists and migrants who do not have sufficient financial resources to travel back, sometimes in the form of a [loan](#) that individuals will have to reimburse afterwards.

The role of technology in consular assistance for stranded nationals

Some countries are relying on digital technology for their consular authorities to get in touch with their nationals and provide them with the necessary information amidst the COVID-19 crisis.



For instance, [Belgium](#) and [France](#), set up an online platform where nationals have to register, while [Slovakia](#) offers a geolocation service of its nationals via the SIM card of their phones.

IOM Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan



IOM Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan to COVID-19 appeals for USD 116.1 million for supporting the Organization to respond to additional needs which have emerged from the current pandemic.

With respect to consular assistance, IOM supports States with the development of operational guidance and assistance for ongoing emergency consular and visa-issuance activities.



Beyond consular assistance

Of course, not all the [272 million international migrants](#) worldwide will seek consular assistance for their repatriation. Many countries' Ministries of Foreign Affairs have been issuing advisories on COVID-19 and travel restrictions to assist their citizens abroad. As part of its commitment to ensuring the welfare of its citizens, the Philippines' [Department of Foreign Affairs](#) is also tracking the number of COVID-19 cases among Filipinos abroad.

Given the travel restrictions and closure of borders, some countries are also assisting migrants and tourists present on their territory with (free) visa renewal/extension. This is the case in [India](#) and [Qatar](#). [Portugal](#) has announced it will be regularizing all migrants who had previously applied for residence permits in order to ensure they will have access to health care and financial support during the pandemic.

Migrant rights groups are also assisting migrants including by sharing information via social media. The Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, for example, created a Facebook page [COVID Migrant Monitor](#) to update migrants on travel restrictions, government responses to COVID-19 and initiatives by migrant groups.

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) (research@iom.int).

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