

More than 17,000 helped to get home from across Africa

UK Government charter flights to bring Brits home from countries in Africa have now flown over 150,000 miles, bringing people back from across six different time zones and enabling over 8,400 stranded travellers to return home from across Africa in addition to over 9,000 the FCO have helped to return home on commercial flights.

Elderly grandparents, families with babies and NHS doctors were among the thousands of people helped by British Embassy and High Commission staff to get on flights after they got stranded while visiting family, working or on holiday.

As well as organising the flights, UK teams went to great lengths to make sure people got home safely, with staff in South Africa driving a collective 7,000 miles to pick up the most elderly and vulnerable passengers to ensure they made their flights.

Elsewhere the team in Kenya sorted emergency travel documents for a new-born baby without a passport, in Nigeria staff made sure a father got home in time for his son's 14th birthday, and the High Commission in Ghana ensured a microbiologist made it back to work on the front line in the UK's fight against coronavirus.

On top of this diplomats were working with partners including Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways to keep as many commercial routes open as possible. Our staff also helped British nationals who could not afford travel costs back to the UK for example by providing emergency loans if they had exhausted all other options. Overall, the Government has enabled tens of thousands of British people who had been visiting Africa to get home.

The number of British travellers returning on Government charter flights include:

- More than 4,300 from South Africa
- More than 2,200 from Nigeria
- More than 900 from Ghana
- More than 200 from The Gambia
- More than 200 from Sierra Leone
- More than 100 from Tanzania
- More than 150 from Sudan
- More than 200 from Uganda
- More than 100 from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon
- More than 50 from West Africa (covering Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea and Cape Verde)

Minister for Africa, James Duddridge said:

The scale of these repatriation efforts is truly remarkable. It's excellent news that so many people are being reunited with their families in the UK and I am very grateful for the sterling work by our embassy teams and to the Governments who have supported us.

Filming a message on social media, father of four Mr Opoku from Manchester said:

I was part of the flight [from Ghana] and it means so much to me and my family to be coming back. What we are saying is thank you very much British High Commission Ghana.

Turning to his four daughters gathered around him the family exclaimed:

Thank you British High Commission Ghana for bringing our Daddy back!

Since the outbreak in Wuhan, it is estimated that over 1.3 million people have returned to the UK via commercial routes. The majority of these routes were supported by the FCO, which worked with airlines and foreign governments to keep vital transit hubs open and ensure that domestic restrictions didn't pose a barrier to getting people home.

Work does not stop here. The UK Government continues to work on more charter flights focussed on where they are most needed, including more flights from Nigeria scheduled this week.

A package of measures to support British travellers who are still waiting to return to the UK has also been put in place. The support package addresses financial issues, healthcare concerns and visa extensions, as well as loans for those who cannot afford flights to the UK where they have exhausted all other options.

Case studies

The efforts of Embassy and High Commission teams include:

- In Nigeria, staff supported a family with toddlers to get home in time for a funeral, with the help of an FCO COVID emergency loan to help purchase tickets for a special UK charter flight.
- Our High Commission in Ghana arranged for hundreds of British travellers to get home to cities around the UK, including Edinburgh, Ipswich, Liverpool and London.
- Our staff in South Africa drove a collective 7,000 miles across the country to pick up a number of elderly passengers to make sure they got to the airport in time. The High Commissioner himself was on hand at the

airport to greet British travellers and help carry luggage. [Photos available]

- On our flight from Tanzania, the team enabled 151 British travellers, including 15 children and 17 pensioners, to return to their families in Belfast, Glasgow and Bolton.