

# UK Government advises against flying over Belarusian airspace

The UK Government is today (Monday 24 May) issuing a notice to advise all UK airlines to cease overflights of Belarusian airspace. Belavia, the Belarusian airline, has also had its operating permit to fly between the UK and Belarus suspended with immediate effect.

Belavia was the only Belarusian airline with a permit to fly into the UK. The Civil Aviation Authority will be instructed not to issue any further ad-hoc permits to Belarusian carriers.

The announcement follows the Belarusian authorities' diversion of a passenger flight from Greece to Lithuania yesterday (Sunday 23 May). The Ryanair jet carrying over 100 passengers was diverted to Minsk on the basis of a false bomb scare in order to arrest an opposition journalist – in a further move by the Belarusian authorities in its ongoing war against independent journalism and opposition voices.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has summoned the Belarusian Ambassador over the United Kingdom's deep alarm at the Belarusian authorities' reckless actions yesterday.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said

The scenario as reported is a shocking assault on civil aviation and an assault on international law. It represents a danger to civilian flights everywhere and it is an egregious and extraordinary departure from international law and international practice.

To ensure the safety of air passengers, I have worked with the Transport Secretary to issue notice to all UK airlines to cease overflights of Belarusian airspace, and to suspend the operating permit on the Belarusian airline Belavia with immediate effect.

The UK Government is calling for the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to urgently look into this matter and is working with international partners and allies on a shared response, including through the UN Security Council, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe and at the G7.

On Sunday afternoon, 23 May, the Belarusian authorities forcibly diverted Ryanair Flight FR4798 (flying direct from Athens to Vilnius) to Minsk. Belarusian state media subsequently confirmed that independent journalist Roman Protasevich was on board and was arrested on arrival in Minsk. There were no British nationals on board the flight.

The UK Government has been at the forefront of the international response towards Belarus. This includes implementing sanctions against Lukashenko and his inner circle, launching and supporting international independent mechanisms to investigate the human rights violations and have increasing financial support to civil society and independent media.

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## **Further £500,000 to support victims of terrorism**

Cruse Bereavement Care, the Peace Foundation, South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and Victim Support will each receive £125,000 to ensure a range of victims' needs are supported. This builds upon the £500,000 originally awarded to these organisations last year.

Since these services were launched in October 2020, they have provided vital support to those affected by terror attacks. The additional funding will mean that victims can continue to access support, including a 24/7 national contact centre and caseworker support, mental health and bereavement services, and facilitated peer support.

We recognise a victim as anyone who has suffered harm, including those who have been injured by, witnesses to, bereaved, responded to or otherwise affected by a terrorist attack. These services will support those affected by domestic and overseas terrorist attacks, and their family members.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

Victims can be affected by terrorist attacks in more ways than many of us could ever imagine.

This funding extension ensures those affected by a terrorist attack in the UK or abroad can access the range of support they need and deserve.

The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, Dame Vera Baird QC, said:

Terror attacks can have a profound and life-changing impact on victims and their families and victims can often have complex needs, which include long-term counselling and support. We need to make sure that when the TV cameras disappear, victims and survivors get the right support they need to rebuild their lives and recover from their injuries.

I welcome this extension of Home Office funding, which will help

strengthen the range of specialist support available for victims and survivors of terror.

Cruse Bereavement Care provide bereavement support for victims not eligible for support under the Homicide Service, while South London and Maudsley NHS Trust's service focusses on outreach, screening, and (where indicated) assessment and onwards referrals for psychological treatments.

Victim Support run a 24/7 National Contact Centre to provide victims with consistent and easily accessible support and the Peace Foundation facilitates a long-term peer support network for victims of terrorism.

The Home Secretary has also committed to reviewing the wider support package available to victims of terrorism.

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## [Thousands of trees planted in Leeds to reduce flood risk and mitigate climate change](#)

The scheme aims to reduce flood risk to 1,048 homes, 474 businesses and key infrastructure along a 14km stretch of the River Aire upstream of Leeds train station.

The project is a collaboration between the Environment Agency, Leeds City Council, the University of Leeds and the River Stewardship Company and aims to store and slow the flow of flood water after heavy rain, create new habitats and store carbon, making Leeds more resilient to climate change.

Students from the University of Leeds will study the effects the trees have on the depth and speed of flood water to inform similar projects in the future.

Fiona Sugden, The Environment Agency's Natural Flood Project Manager for Leeds, said:

This tree planting programme is fantastic news for Leeds and is being replicated across the River Aire catchment as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme's Natural Flood Management Programme.

The creation of a woodland area at the Brownlee Triathlon Centre will have multiple benefits for people and wildlife – reducing flood risk downstream, benefitting the environment by

creating new woodland habitat, enhancing biodiversity, helping mitigate climate change and providing valuable data to help us understand how well natural flood techniques perform.

The Triathlon Centre is a real asset for students and the local community, and we hope that visitors will also be able to learn about how effective natural flood management can be.

James Wright, Head of Grounds and Gardens at the University of Leeds, added:

We are delighted to have been a key partner in this scheme and assisted in the planting of 5,000 trees as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme Natural Flood Management Programme. This work has involved exceptional collaboration between academic and operational colleagues at the University of Leeds and the Environment Agency.

The site will provide significant research opportunities for University of Leeds students and academics for many years undertaking research in a range of specialisms. The site provides a great engagement opportunity for the local community to fully understand the range of natural flood management solutions installed in the Aire Valley catchment and research undertaken at the University.

Councillor Helen Hayden, Leeds City Council's Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate, said:

This is an excellent example of the types of natural techniques being used across the River Aire catchment to build the city's resilience to climate change. The wider natural flood management programme, which is a key part of the next phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, will significantly reduce flood risk to previously affected residents and businesses downstream in Leeds, whilst also bringing other benefits such as capturing carbon and habitat creation.

The trees were planted by the River Stewardship Company on the Bodington Playing Fields site between February and March 2021, and were initially grown at The Arium Nursery in Leeds.

For more information about the LeedsFAS visit [www.leeds.gov.uk/fas](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/fas).

If you have land and would like to know more about how you could be involved in a Natural Flood Management project, please get in touch with the project team. Email: [LeedsFAS.nfm@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:LeedsFAS.nfm@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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## Highlight on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

**Written by Ian Coady, Geospatial Adviser for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Deputy Head of the Government Geography Profession.**

On the evening of 21 March 2021, I sat down with my daughter to complete our census return and as we worked our way through the questionnaire I tried explaining to her how the results of the census might help improve the services she receives throughout her life. She of course didn't care – why would she, she is 13 years old and improved service provision is the last thing on her mind, but I felt I should at least make an effort to explain to her the hidden role that data plays in all our lives.

Prior to moving to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) a couple of years ago I spent over a decade with the Office for National Statistics working on census and the integration of statistics and geospatial data. I therefore hoped I could explain to my uninterested daughter that good data provides good analysis and there is no better data available than that provided through the census.

There are places in the world however where the complex and fragile nature of the country means it isn't possible to collect data through traditional census enumeration. Somalia has not conducted a population census since 1985 and Afghanistan's first and only census took place in 1979 and didn't cover the entire country. This means that for countries where collecting data is difficult, it can be extremely challenging for governments to make good decisions based on reliable data.

As an attempt to improve the quality and accessibility of data in low- and middle-income countries, FCDO and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation established the [GRID3](#) (or 'Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development' to give it its full title) programme in March 2018. This is a partnership between the WorldPop Project at the University of Southampton, the Flowminder Foundation, Columbia University's Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

They work with partner governments in Africa on extracting settlement and infrastructure information from high-resolution satellite imagery and with the National Statistical Institutes of those countries to produce modelled population estimates. Where a census is out of date or not possible these outputs are used to support analysis and decision-making.

Producing settlement maps for census enumeration in Democratic Republic of Congo

The programme is now working effectively in a number of countries on the development of geospatial and demographic data. This data has been integrated into a number of different use cases in the health, education, finance, and disaster risk reduction sectors. In Sierra Leone, GRID3 data has underpinned analysis into the distribution of school locations by comparing them to the gridded population estimates and identifying the number and percentage of children that don't have access to education. These figures can then feed into education policy and intervention.

In Nigeria, GRID3 partnered with Data Science Nigeria to map out women and men who lacked access to banking services. As well combining aggregated bank details with GRID3 population estimates to identify the penetration of banking services in a geographic area, they were also able to disaggregate the results of age and sex and provide inclusive data on access to financial services at lower geographic level than had ever been previously possible.

#### Demonstrating analysis based on GRID3 data in Zambia

The value of the GRID3 programme has been particularly evident over the last year however as countries have needed high quality demographic and geographic data to try to manage the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). The requirement to support COVID-19 response has also introduced the use of mobile data into the GRID3 work programme as a method of tracking population movement and measuring the effectiveness of restrictions. GRID3 data has been used by both Nigeria's Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, and the Government of Sierra Leone as part of developing their COVID-19 response measures.

Looking ahead, countries will need to move from the implementation of policy to contain the transmission of COVID-19, to the roll out of national vaccine programmes under the global COVAX initiative. This too will need to ensure that data is high-quality, timely and accessible to ensure that vaccination programmes are effective in distributing vaccines to the right people at the right time and saving lives.

For this reason, GRID3 has already invested in the development of settlement extents for the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa and will be investing a further £2.4 million in supporting the COVAX vaccination roll out. This should ensure that the programme continues to drive the availability of high quality geographic and demographic data, and to help improve decision-making in countries where it has historically been difficult.

Read more blogs on the [Analysis in Government Month hub page](#).

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# ESFA appoints Kirsty Evans as Director of Further Education

News story

Following a competitive recruitment process, Kirsty Evans has been appointed as substantive Director of the Further Education (FE) Directorate at ESFA.



[Kirsty](#) has 25 years' experience working in the education and skills system, and was previously responsible for ESFA's adult funding operations. She has been leading the FE directorate as Acting Director since April 2020 and has also overseen the co-ordination of ESFA's response to COVID-19.

Under Kirsty's leadership, the FE directorate will deliver key priorities including supporting the sector to engage and identify skills needs of local learners, employers and stakeholders to meet the ambitions of the FE white paper, and enabling the sector to play a vital role in building back better and supporting recovery from the pandemic through high quality skills, training and job opportunities.

The FE directorate will help to realise these priorities by working across ESFA to promote financial health and efficiency in the sector through effective oversight, monitoring and where necessary intervention, as well as ensuring that providers as users of ESFA systems and services receive timely and accurate information, allocations and payments so they are in the best position to deliver world class training and skills.

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