



Note No. 355/24

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) presents its compliments to all Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations and has the honour to refer to road safety requirements whilst driving in the UK.

In accordance with Article 41(1) of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961 (VCDR), Article 55(1) of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963 (VCCR) and Agreements with relevant International Organisations present in the UK, all persons enjoying diplomatic, consular and other privileges and immunities have a duty to respect the laws and regulations of the UK.

This includes adherence to UK road safety laws, regulations and other requirements, which is important for the safety and well-being of the driver, their passengers, other road users and members of the public. Diplomatic missions and international organisations are reminded specifically, but not exclusively, of the following traffic offences in UK law and requirements:

- **Alcohol and drugs:** there are strict alcohol limits for drivers. Driving whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a serious offence in UK law. Even a first offence of this kind by a person with diplomatic or other privileges and immunities could lead to a request by the FCDO for their withdrawal, particularly if violence or injury to a third party aggravates the offence. For a second offence, the FCDO will automatically request the withdrawal of the offender.
- **Speeding and contravening a red traffic signal:** driving in excess of the speed limit and contravening a red traffic signal are offences. The registered keeper of the vehicle is expected to identify and inform the police of the name of the person who was driving at the time of the offence. Drivers with privileges and immunities are required to pay a fixed penalty notice fine of £100 and have their Diplomatic Driving Permit (if they have one) endorsed with penalty points. Repeat offenders could lead to a request by the FCDO for the withdrawal of the entitled person. If the driver did not enjoy privileges and immunities at the time of the offence, they will be expected to comply with any police instructions with regards to payment of fines and endorsement of driving licences.
- **Valid driving licence and insurance:** driving without an appropriate licence automatically invalidates a person's insurance. Driving without insurance is a serious offence. Drivers must not only hold a valid driving licence, but also be covered by at least third-party insurance. Drivers with privileges and immunities should particularly bear in mind the need for third party insurance when driving cars they do not own. Failure to hold third party insurance for themselves, or any member of their family who drives a car, is likely to lead to a request for their withdrawal from the UK. It is recommended that drivers carry paper/email copies of their insurance whilst driving.

- **Road worthiness:** vehicle owners are responsible for making sure their vehicle is always safe to drive. Vehicles more than three years old require yearly MOT tests to ensure it meets minimum safety standards. Failure to have an MOT or drive an unsafe vehicle is an offence.
- **Accidents:** UK law requires drivers to stop if they are involved in an accident. Damage only accidents require the exchange of names and addresses with the other driver at the scene of the accident. Personal injury accidents require the exchange of insurance details in addition to names and addresses. Drivers must also report the accident to the police within 24 hours if personal injury was caused.
- **Seat belts:** seat belts should be properly adjusted and worn by the driver and all passengers travelling in a motor car. Driving without seat belts is an offence.
- **Mobile devices:** using a phone, sat-nav or other device whilst driving, without hands free equipment, is an offence.
- **Use of official vehicles:** only those enjoying privileges and immunities should be permitted to drive vehicles registered to diplomatic or consular missions or international organisations. Service staff and locally-engaged staff may drive a diplomatic or consular registered vehicle while on official duty only, provided they hold a valid driving licence or permit. Personal use of such a vehicle by service staff and locally engaged staff is not permitted.
- **Unidentified drivers:** when the police are not able to identify the driver of a vehicle registered to a diplomatic mission or international organisation in relation to an alleged traffic offence, for example through speed camera capture, the diplomatic mission or international organisation is required to identify and name the driver to Protocol Directorate so that driving offences can be attributed correctly.

Protocol Directorate would also like to take this opportunity to remind diplomatic missions and international organisations of the following:

- **Left-side driving:** extra care should be taken by drivers who are unfamiliar with or unused to driving on the left-side of the road, as in the UK. For the safety of themselves and others, drivers should familiarise themselves with the UK Highway Code ([link below](#)).
- **Diplomatic driving permits:** those with privileges and immunities (including family members accepted by the FCDO) who wish to drive in the UK but are unable to use their own national driving licence, may apply to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) for a courtesy diplomatic driving permit. These permits may only be used in conjunction with a valid full foreign driving licence. The permits are a concession and are not a UK driving licence. Applicants for diplomatic driving permits must fill in the health and eyesight questions on the DVLA application form (D442/1). If applicants do not meet the necessary health and eyesight requirements under the UK's driving licence laws, the application for a permit may be declined. British, dual British nationals, or those with indefinite leave to remain are not entitled to a diplomatic driving permit. Members of international organisations who enjoy privileges and

immunities and do not have a valid UK licence may apply for a diplomatic driving permit if they wish.

- **Annual Written Ministerial Statements on serious offences and debt:** the FCDO has an obligation to submit an annual report to Parliament listing all serious offences allegedly committed by individuals in the UK who are entitled to diplomatic and other privileges and immunities. The statements include the country of the mission, or the name of the international organisation, involved, and the nature of the alleged offence. The name of alleged individual offenders is withheld. An annual report is also submitted to Parliament on outstanding debt owed by those with diplomatic or other privileges and immunities, in relation to unpaid car parking tickets and fines and non-payment of the London congestion charge and fines, as well as non-payment of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR). Protocol Directorate requests all diplomatic missions and international organisations to settle outstanding debt at the earliest opportunity.

Further guidance on UK road safety requirements and FCDO policy and procedures relating to road safety and driving in the UK can be found at:

UK Government Portal:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/general-rules-techniques-and-advice-for-all-drivers-and-riders-103-to-158>
- <https://www.gov.uk/drink-drive-limit>
- <https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>
- <https://www.gov.uk/speed-limits>
- <https://www.gov.uk/browse/driving/penalty-points-fines-bans>
- <https://www.gov.uk/getting-an-mot>
- <https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving>

FCDO Protocol Directorate Portal:

- <https://protocol.fcdo.gov.uk/vehicles-and-petrol/driving-in-the-uk/>
- <https://protocol.fcdo.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/INF267-010524.pdf>

Protocol Directorate of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office avails itself of this opportunity to renew to all diplomatic missions and international organisations the assurances of its highest consideration.

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH & DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE

LONDON SW1A 2AH

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