

CMA to investigate concerns about cancellation policies

Through its Covid-19 Taskforce, which monitors market developments and identifies the big problems facing consumers, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has seen increasing numbers of complaints in relation to cancellations and refunds.

These now account for 4 out of 5 complaints being received into the Taskforce and so far include concerns about businesses refusing refunds or firms pressuring people to accept vouchers for holiday accommodation, which can only be used during a more expensive period.

Based on the complaints received, the CMA has identified 3 sectors of particular concern:

- weddings and private events
- holiday accommodation
- nurseries and childcare providers

It will tackle these areas as a priority and then move on to examine other sectors, based on the information received by the taskforce.

The CMA acknowledges that most businesses are acting reasonably in what are unprecedented circumstances, and the current crisis is placing everyone under pressure, but consumer rights cannot be ignored.

If it finds evidence that companies are failing to comply with the law, the CMA will take appropriate enforcement action, including moving quickly to court if a firm does not address its concerns. Individuals can also take their own legal action against unfair terms should they choose to.

As well as examining specific sectors, the CMA is [issuing a statement](#) on its views on consumer protection law in relation to cancellations and refunds during the current crisis.

For most consumer contracts, the CMA would expect a full refund to be issued where:

- a business has cancelled a contract without providing any of the promised goods or services
- no service is provided by a business, for example because this is prevented by the restrictions that apply during the current lockdown
- a consumer cancels or is prevented from receiving the service, for example due to the restrictions that apply during the current lockdown

It also advises that businesses should not be profiting by 'double recovering' their money from the Government and customers.

Andrea Coscelli, CEO of the CMA, said:

Our Covid-19 taskforce is shining a light on some of the big issues facing consumers in wake of this pandemic. Alongside price-gouging reports, we're now seeing cancellation issues in their thousands. So far, the CMA has identified weddings, holiday accommodation and childcare as particular areas of concern.

The current situation is throwing up challenges for everyone, including businesses, but that does not mean that consumer rights can fall by the wayside. If we find evidence that businesses are failing to comply with consumer protection law then we will get tough – that means launching enforcement cases and moving to court action where there is a strong reason to do so.

If people have been affected by unfair cancellation terms in wake of Covid-19, they can report them to the CMA using the [online form](#).

Whilst the CMA is not able to respond directly to every complaint it receives, the information provided will help the CMA to decide which issues to address as part of this rolling programme of work.

Notes to Editor

1. The [Covid-19 Taskforce](#) was launched on 20 March to scrutinise market developments, identify harmful sales and pricing practices as they emerge and take enforcement action if there is evidence firms may have breached competition or consumer protection law.
2. Protecting consumers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: [update on the work of the CMA's Taskforce](#).
3. The key pieces of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's investigation are the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA) and the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs). The CRA prohibits the use of unfair terms in contracts between businesses and consumers. The CPRs prohibit unfair commercial practices by businesses towards consumers.
4. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

[Another 900 British travellers in New](#)

Zealand set to return to the UK

Press release

Around 900 more British travellers in New Zealand are set to return home on three additional UK Government-chartered flights.



The most vulnerable people will be prioritised for the flights, scheduled for the 11 and 15 May from Auckland, and 13 May from Christchurch.

Flight details are as follows:

- 11 May – Auckland – London Heathrow
- 13 May – Christchurch – London Heathrow
- 15 May – Auckland – London Heathrow

The Government has already organised five charter flights which will bring home from New Zealand around 1,555 travellers between 24 April and 2 May. In addition, a further 3,700 people have flown home on commercial flights – with the support of the British High Commission in Wellington.

Lord Goldsmith, Minister responsible for New Zealand, said:

These three additional UK-chartered flights from New Zealand will bring home around 900 British travellers, in addition to the 1,500 we flew back on our first five flights.

We recognise that this has been a challenging time for Britons in New Zealand and we are grateful for their patience as we have worked with the authorities to deal with a complex logistical operation to make these flights happen. Our High Commission staff are working incredibly hard to support both those British travellers who wish to travel home, and those who remain in the

country.

British High Commissioner to New Zealand Laura Clarke said:

We are doing all we can to help British people get back home to the UK, and these additional charter flights will help more people to do that.

My team and I will continue to do all we can to support those who are still in New Zealand, throughout this crisis and beyond.

The £75m partnership with airlines announced in March has enabled us to return thousands of Brits through special chartered flights. We will continue to work closely with the airlines to help as many British travellers as possible to get home to the UK, including through commercial means.

Notes to editors

1. Eligible British travellers in New Zealand will be contacted by the High Commission to book their flight.
2. Vulnerable people are classified as those over the age of 70, those under 70 with an underlying serious or complex health condition and those who are pregnant.
3. For those not currently eligible to book on these charter flights, support remains available from High Commission staff in New Zealand.
4. Tickets for the flights will cost £800. Those unable to afford travel costs and have exhausted all other options may be eligible to apply for an emergency loan from public funds.
5. Since the outbreak of coronavirus in Wuhan, we have helped more than a million British citizens return home on commercial flights – backed up by our work with the airlines and foreign governments to keep flights running. A £75m partnership with airlines announced by the Foreign Secretary on 30 March has enabled us to return thousands more on special charters.

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Addressing COVID-19 in Syria

Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you, also, Mark, for your briefing today.

Mr President, the United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the potentially catastrophic impact of COVID-19 in Syria. We've heard today there are 43 confirmed cases and likely already many more – unknown because of the lack of testing capacity. The 6.2 million internally displaced Syrians face a particularly severe risk. Almost 940,000 of those are living in appalling conditions in the northwest.

The United Kingdom is committed to playing its part to tackle the spread and impact of coronavirus in Syria and other vulnerable countries across the globe. So far we have pledged over \$900 million to the international response to help end the pandemic. \$350 million of this funding is helping to reduce mass infections in vulnerable countries. Our money would install new hand washing stations, isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps and increase access to clean water for those living in areas of armed conflict. As the third largest bilateral humanitarian donor to the Syrian response, with over \$4 billion spent since the conflict began, we are urgently working to ensure our significant humanitarian programme across Syria, including, of course, in those areas under regime control, can most effectively address the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic. And we welcome the recent increase in cross-border aid into northwest Syria and the maintenance of the ceasefire agreed between Russia and Turkey on the 5th of March. This is helping humanitarian agencies to meet huge needs in Idlib and to focus on the threat of COVID-19. The evidence is clear that the UN cross-border mandate must continue past July.

Colleagues, coronavirus knows no borders. It knows no front lines. It is a threat to all in Syria and beyond. Preventing it is a matter of humanity, not of politics. We must ensure that no part of Syria is neglected in the effort to prevent and prepare for the potential spread of the virus.

And that's why we're so concerned about the northeast of Syria. Both OCHA and the World Health Organisation have highlighted a dangerous void. The World Health Organisation has confirmed the first death from COVID-19 in that area. And we know from what we've learned everywhere else in the world that community transmission is surely ongoing. Yet there are apparently only 35 ICU beds in the whole of the region.

As OCHA told us in this Council on the 24th of April, humanitarian assistance delivered by land or air has only reached 31% of the health facilities previously supplied cross-border via Yaroubiya. That means 69% of health facilities are not receiving the supplies that they need. Moreover, the urgency to address the pandemic is not reflected in the pace of approvals for cross-line assistance. As noted in the SG's report, the authorities in

Damascus continue to take three to four months to respond to medical delivery requests to the northeast.

Colleagues, with a need so pressing, we must work together. We must put aside previous political differences. We must enable the United Nations to use all modalities for the specific purpose of preventing a health disaster for as long as coronavirus poses such a threat.

The United Kingdom is proud to stand with many others around this Council table as part of a decisive and coordinated action to tackle the spread and impact of coronavirus in vulnerable countries across the globe. We must work together to do the same for Syria. We must give the United Nations and its humanitarian partners the best chance of being able to respond to the outbreak in all areas via all necessary modalities. Tackling this global pandemic invokes our common humanity. We should all think carefully about the actions and decisions that we can take.

Thank you, Mr President.

Major home testing programme for coronavirus will track levels of infection in the community

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Charter flight from Guyana for stranded British nationals

Press release

A Government charter flight to bring home around 100 Britons stranded in

Guyana has been announced – with booking open today.



The flight will depart from Georgetown Cheddi Jagan International Airport for London Gatwick on 7 May. It will come via Buenos Aires, with around 200 British nationals already on board, returning from Argentina.

British travellers in Guyana should visit FCO Travel Advice pages for further information on how to register. Priority is initially being given to vulnerable passengers – those over 70 and others who have medical requirements.

Once this flight is completed the number of British travellers who have returned from South America on Government charter flights will be to over 3,000.

Minister for the Caribbean, Baroness Sugg said:

This is our latest flight from South America and the Caribbean, with around 300 more British travellers being able to get back to the UK to be with their families. Our staff will continue to support those Britons who remain in Guyana and Argentina throughout this crisis.

Greg Quinn, High Commissioner to Guyana, said:

Providing support to British travellers who are in Guyana and want to return home is our number one priority. I encourage all those with an interest to register now as it is unlikely that there will be any further charter flights. I'd also like to thank the Guyanese authorities and Air Europa for helping to make this happen.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (30 March) – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

1. The charter flights are for UK travellers who normally reside in the UK and their direct dependents. A number of seats will be reserved for those deemed vulnerable.
2. To book flights and register their details, British nationals should check the FCO [Travel Advice pages](#)
 - Movement within Guyana is currently very restricted due to a 6pm to 6am national curfew. The British High Commission will contact those who have confirmed seats on the flight with further details regarding transport.
 - Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed.
 - Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal.
1. The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British nationals who remain in Guyana.
2. These UK Government chartered flights follow flights from Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador and Peru, meaning we will have brought back over 2500 British travellers from South America and helped hundreds more return through commercial routes.

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