THE FAMILY INFORMATION BOOKLET

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*This booklet provides useful information for families who accompany Foreign Service employees on their postings abroad*

# FOREWORD

Dear family members of posted employees

You have some exciting and challenging years ahead of you, and I hope you will bring back many good memories from your time abroad. The Ministry wants to make it as easy as possible for Foreign Service employees to take their families with them on their postings abroad, and we seek to pursue a good, inclusive family policy.

Working in the Foreign Service, which often involves transfers to and from the Ministry in Oslo and the missions abroad, poses challenges, not only for the posted employees themselves but also for their families. Having adequate information is important for overcoming these challenges. This booklet provides useful information for families who accompany Foreign Service employees on their postings abroad. It is largely based on frequently asked questions received by the Ministry.

This booklet can be downloaded from family portal on the Government’s website *regjeringen.no*. If you have any further questions, you can also contact the Section for Recruitment and Personnel (SECT-RecruitmentAndPersonnel@mfa.no)

I wish you and your family an exciting, interesting and rewarding time abroad.

Oslo, 21 April 2017

Anne Lund

Director General

# PART 1: PREPARING TO GO ABROAD

*You can find the Ministry’s family portal on the Government’s website: regjeringen.no*

## 1.1 KEY DOCUMENTS

**The country report**

All Norwegian missions are required to draw up a country report. These reports contain a good deal of information that is useful for the whole family. They are available to Ministry employees on the Ministry’s intranet (UDintra). The reports include general information about the country, day care facilities for young children, schools, employment opportunities for accompanying spouses/cohabitants, the formal status of cohabitants, hospitals, health issues, air pollution, food safety, security/crime, transport and communications, leisure activities, food and consumer goods. You should ask your spouse/cohabitant to print out a copy of the report.

**Special Agreement on Allowances, Benefits and Remuneration for Employees in the Foreign Service**

Employees who are posted abroad receive a number of benefits in addition to their salaries. These benefits are regulated by the *Special* *Agreement on Allowances, Benefits and Remuneration for Employees in the Foreign Service.*

The parties to the Special Agreement are the Ministry (as employer) and the employees’ organisations. The Agreement applies to paid employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who are posted to a Norwegian diplomatic or consular mission.

The main allowance is the overseas allowance, which compensates the posted employee for additional living expenses during the posting. A higher overseas allowance is paid when the posted employee is accompanied by his/her spouse/cohabitant. In addition, a child allowance is provided for accompanying children under the age of 18.

Expenses for private day care for children and schooling are also covered under the Special Agreement in cases where private day care is necessary to ensure a similar standard to that available in Norway.

Expenses are covered for compassionate travel both for the posted employee and accompanying family members in connection with a death, life-threatening illness or accident involving a close family member in Norway.

*The Special Agreement is published on regjeringen.no*

THE SPECIAL AGREEMENT

The following allowances and benefits are provided under the Special Agreement:

* The overseas allowance is intended to cover higher living expenses in connection with transfer to and service at a Norwegian diplomatic or consular mission.
* The higher overseas allowance is intended to cover the higher living expenses connected with having an accompanying spouse permanently resident at the place of service.
* The child allowance is intended to cover higher living expenses connected with having a child/children permanently resident at the place of service.
* The hardship allowance is intended to cover higher living expenses at a place of service where living conditions are particularly difficult, and to cover travel expenses for breaks away from the place of service.
* The family separation allowance is intended to cover extra expenses connected with the posted employee’s travel back to Norway and other extra expenses incurred in connection with maintaining contact with his/her spouse/cohabitant and children who are resident in Norway.

*The Special Agreement is published on regjeringen.no (Norwegian only)*

*It may be helpful to consult your local family counselling service (familievernkontoret) if there are family issues you are concerned about.*

## 1.2 FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER

We recommend that you start preparing to go abroad as early as possible. This is particularly important if you have children who will be accompanying you. All Norwegian missions have a family liaison officer, who can provide information about local schools, day care facilities for young children and employment opportunities. Contact the mission if you need any further information.

It may also be a good idea to contact other people who have served at the mission concerned and their families. They may be able to provide you with useful information about what it is like to live and work in the country or area in question.

## 1.3 CHILDREN AND SERVICE ABROAD

Having parents who are posted abroad can be difficult for some children. This applies both to children who accompany their parents on a posting abroad and to those who stay in Norway. We recommend that parents attend the Ministry’s annual course for employees and their spouses/cohabitants who are preparing for a posting abroad. The possible psychological problems that may arise in connection with serving abroad is one of the topics covered on the course.

The course also looks at other challenges that both the posted employee and his/her family may meet, including, for example, how living in different countries may affect children, how they may react to different cultures, and how they may be affected by language challenges, etc.

**Children with special needs**

Children with special needs, for example relating to their health, or their physical or social development, may experience greater difficulties than other children. Parents should be particularly aware of this, and should consider their child’s needs and the number of times the child will have to move when choosing the place of service. As the employer, the Ministry will seek to ensure that the best possible information is provided in job advertisements, during interviews, in the country reports, in the information meetings for employees preparing for a posting abroad, and at the individual medical check-ups carried out by Aleris in connection with a posting abroad. See also section 1.6 on health issues, medical check-ups and vaccinations.

**Family counselling services**

Itmay be helpful to consult your local family counselling service (*familievernkontoret*) if there are family issues you are concerned about*.* This service is free, and you do not need a referral. You can find a list of family counselling offices on the website of the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (*bufetat.no*). There are also a number of helpful brochures that you can download from the website.

*The Ministry provides financial support to help children (aged 5-18) learn the language used at their new school before they leave Norway.*

*Support is also provided for other educational programmes such as Norgesskolen, a summer school in Norwegian language and culture (see nww.no/kategori/norgesskolen-engelsk/).*

*The following online educational programmes are approved by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training:*

* *Globalskolen: globalskolen.no*
* *Norskskolen: norskskolen.com*

## 1.4 SCHOOLING

**Schooling at the place of service**

Under the Special Agreement, children are entitled to receive schooling that is at least as good as the schooling they are entitled to in Norway. When this standard of schooling cannot be provided by the state school system at the place of service, the cost of private schooling will be covered. In cases where it is necessary to make use of a private school, the posted employee must submit an application to the mission for coverage of these expenses. The mission assesses the application before forwarding it to the Ministry.

It should be noted that only the cost of ordinary schooling is covered. Non-compulsory extracurricular activities such as summer school, or other expenses such as school transport, school supplies or school lunches are not covered.

**Leave of absence from school in Norway**

Under the Education Act, children do not have the right to a leave of absence from their Norwegian school while they are abroad. This means that they are not guaranteed a place in the same class or at the same school on their return.

**Right to a school place in Norway**

Primary and lower secondary school are compulsory in Norway. Children and young people are entitled to receive public primary and lower secondary education in accordance with the Education Act and associated regulations. Primary and lower secondary pupils have the right to attend the school closest to their home or a school in the catchment area to which they belong.

In general, families may not apply for a school place until they are back in Norway. However, the Ministry recommends that families contact the school before they return home. If it would be helpful for the family, the Section for Recruitment and Personnel can write to the school on the Ministry’s behalf asking the school to take account of the child’s and the family’s need for predictability on their return to Norway.

## 1.5 INFORMATION MEETINGS, COURSES AND LANGUAGE TRAINING

**Information meetings**

The Ministry arranges a meeting for employees who are preparing for a posting abroad and their families, where we provide information on topics such as health, national insurance, moving, insurance, employment opportunities for spouses/cohabitants, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and entitlements under the Special Agreement on Allowances, Benefits and Remuneration for Employees in the Foreign Service, etc.

The aim of these meetings is to prepare the employee and his/her accompanying family for the challenges they may meet during the moving process and while they are abroad, and to provide information about the various kinds of support the Foreign Service and other public bodies can offer.

The Ministry also arranges an information day on psychological problems that may arise during service abroad. Half the day is devoted to general challenges that apply to all those travelling abroad in connection with a posting. The rest of the day focuses on children and their experiences. The overall aim of the day is to shed light on the various reactions you may experience during the moving process and when confronted with different cultures and language challenges, and to identify common pitfalls and coping strategies. The aim of the second part of the day is to raise awareness of how best to meet the needs of children.

**Language**

The Ministry holds language courses for accompanying spouses/cohabitants. Further information can be found on the website of the Foreign Service Institute on UDintra.

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*The Ministry holds language courses for accompanying spouses/ cohabitants.*

*Further information can be found on the website of the Foreign Service Institute on UDintra. You can also contact the Foreign Service Institute Language Centre by email: sprakenheten@mfa,no.*

## 1.6 HEALTH ISSUES, MEDICAL CHECK-UPS AND VACCINATIONS

The Ministry provides a free medical check-up for employees and accompanying family members prior to each posting abroad.

For employees who will be serving at a mission where there are special requirements for rest and recuperation (R&R) leave, a more comprehensive medical check-up will be carried out before and during the posting. This will include evaluation by a psychologist, and will also be offered to accompanying spouses.

Medical check-ups and vaccinations are currently carried out by Aleris, which has expertise in travel medicine, tropical medicine and treatment of work-related disorders. A number of issues will be raised during the medical check-up, including the climate in the country concerned, local diseases, drug and alcohol abuse and other dependency problems, issues that can affect children, and various health problems you and your family may experience during the posting. The purpose is to provide an opportunity to reflect on possible problems with a view to ensuring the best possible stay abroad for you and your family.

In recent years, there has been particular focus on air pollution and how this affects the health of employees and accompanying family members in both the short and the long term. At the request of the Ministry, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health has recommended a number of steps that should be taken by the Ministry, the individual missions and the employees themselves to minimise health risks. In addition, the Ministry has drawn up an action plan that contains advice for employees, actions to be taken by the missions, and guidelines on the length of service, as well as appropriate training courses and systematic health, safety and environment work.

The action plan, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health recommendations and other relevant documents are available on UDintra. Employees can download these documents and send them on to their spouse/cohabitant.

*The Ministry urges parents to consider carefully whether children under the age of 16 should accompany them on postings to areas with severe air pollution.*

**Vaccination**

Vaccinations are carried out by Aleris Helse (see contact information below). The Ministry covers the cost of any necessary vaccines. If vaccinations are carried out by a different healthcare provider, the Ministry will cover these expenses provided a receipt is provided and the expenses are entered into the travel expenses system. Further information can be found in the country report.

It should be noted that in Norway, vaccination of children is provided through the municipal health service and is carried out by your local family health clinic (*helsestasjon*). The posted employee must cover the cost of vaccinations carried out at the place of service, and these expenses are compensated for in the overseas allowance (see the Special Agreement). Vaccination expenses for children are only reimbursed for vaccines against diseases that may be contracted in the country concerned.

*Aleris Norway - administration:*

*Frederik Stangs gate 11–13, 0264 Oslo*

*Tel: +47 22 54 10 00*

[*www.aleris.no*](http://www.aleris.no)

***For appointments/medical check-ups, contact Anne Næsset***

*Tel: +47 22 54 11 20*

*Tel: +47 22 54 11 54*

*email: anne.nasset@aleris.no*

***For a more comprehensive check-up – consultation with a psychologist:***

*Specialist in Clinical Psychology Torunn Østerbø*

*Fridtjof Nansens plass 8*

*0160 Oslo*

*Tel.: +47 46 16 26 05*

***For advice and information on vaccinations or travel medicine, contact:***

*Ingvild or Lise*

*Tel: +47 971 08 667*

## 1.7 PASSPORT/VISA

All employees and accompanying family members need either a diplomatic or a service passport, which is issued by the Section for Diplomatic Relations. The employee’s and his/her family members’ ordinary passports that were issued by the police must be handed in.

Questions about passports can be addressed to the Diplomatic Section: diplomatseksjonen@mfa.no

**PASSPORTS**: in order to be issued with diplomatic or service passports, the employee and all accompanying family members must appear in person at the Diplomatic Section. You can book an appointment here: https://ventus.enalog.se/Booking/Booking/ Index/Utenriksdep

When you come for your appointment, a valid ordinary passport (issued by the police) must be shown. The Diplomatic Section will collect biometric data (digital photo, finger prints, signature) and other personal details. It will take approximately a week for the passport to be issued. Special rules apply to spouses/cohabitants who are not Norwegian or EEA citizens. Further information can be obtained from the Diplomatic Section: diplomatseksjonen@mfa.no.

VISA: The Diplomatic Section assists employees and family members with acquiring visas from the authorities in the country concerned. You should contact the Section in good time to find out whether a visa is required and, if so, to get assistance with acquiring the visa. Please note that some countries have special rules for issuing visas to accompanying family members and to cohabitants and other partners. In some countries, it may take several months for a visa to be issued.

## 1.8 RIGHT TO RESIDENCE IN NORWAY FOR SPOUSES/COHABITANTS WHO ARE NOT NORWEGIAN OR EEA CITIZENS

Spouses/cohabitants who are not Norwegian or EEA citizens should contact the Directorate of Immigration before moving from Norway to find out about their rights and obligations with regard to obtaining a residence permit on their return to Norway.

## 1.9 NATIONAL REGISTRY (FOLKEREGISTERET)

Foreign Service employees who are posted abroad are considered to be resident in the municipality where they were living before their departure from Norway. Please note that accompanying family members who are nationals of the country of service are automatically registered in the National Registry as having emigrated from Norway.

You should notify the National Registry, which is under the Norwegian Tax Administration (Skatteetaten) of any changes in civil status (marriage, divorce, birth of children, etc.). Changes to your residential address in Norway during your posting abroad must also be reported to the Norwegian Tax Administration.

## 1.10 REDIRECTING PRIVATE MAIL

You should make arrangements for your private mail to be redirected to the mission or your private address in the country you are being posted to well before you leave Norway. The Ministry’s address can only be used for personal letters in countries where there are particular problems with the postal services. For more information, send an email to the Section for Property Management and General Services: Enhet.For.Fellestjenester@mfa.no

Please note that printed matter addressed to you that is sent to the Ministry will not be sent on, but will be destroyed.

There are also restrictions on sending parcels. The Ministry must know what all parcels contain. If there is any doubt about the content of a parcel, it will be opened and anything that cannot be sent on will be removed and stored temporarily in the Ministry. The addressee will be notified. Examples of items that cannot be sent on include: liquids, creams, food and organic materials, and batteries.

A safe system for opening all mail, including private mail, to the Ministry and missions abroad was introduced in spring 2017. Information about this system is available on UDintra. For security reasons, all post to the Ministry will be opened and sealed again in a protected environment in the Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation (DSS) before it is sent on to the relevant mission, unless otherwise agreed.

We encourage posted employees and their accompanying family members to use a digital mailbox. This is a secure system for receiving and storing important mail, such as letters from public bodies containing official decisions, health information or other sensitive information. You can also receive mail from other entities that serve the general public such as banks, insurance companies, electricity companies, etc.

*See also:*

[*https://www.norge.no/en/about-digital-mailbox*](https://www.norge.no/en/about-digital-mailbox)

## 1.11 LEAVE FOR SPOUSES/COHABITANTS FROM THEIR OWN JOBS

Spouses/cohabitants may apply to their employers for leave of absence if they wish to accompany a Foreign Service employee on a posting abroad.

Government employees who accompany their spouse on a posting abroad may, in cases where the posted employee has a duty to accept a posting (i.e. is a rotational employee), be given up to 12 years’ leave. Registered partners and cohabitants have the same rights as spouses. During their leave, these government employees will continue to build up seniority. For more information, see section 10.8 of the Norwegian civil service handbook (*Statens personalhåndbok* – Norwegian only), which can be found on *Lovdata.no*.

For members of the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund (Statens pensjonskasse), four years of this leave will be registered as pensionable service. More information can be found in section 9.17 of the Norwegian civil service handbook (*Statens personalhåndbok* – Norwegian only).

Government employees who accompany their spouse/cohabitant on a posting abroad in cases where the posted employee does not have a duty to accept a posting (i.e. is a non-rotational employee) may be granted unpaid leave of absence at the discretion of their employer.

Employers in the municipal and private sectors make decisions on applications for leave on the basis of their own rules. Practice in some municipalities, such as Oslo and Bærum, is similar to that of the central government administration.

## 1.12 THE MOVING PROCESS

**Leave in connection with moving**

Posted employees are entitled to paid compassionate leave of two days before they leave Norway and of two days in connection with moving to the country to which they are have been posted. An application for compassionate leave must be registered in SAP.

**Removals company**

The Ministry has agreements with a number of removals companies. Only removals companies with which the Ministry has an agreement may be used for removals. This applies to removals from Norway to the mission, from the mission back to Norway, or from one mission to another. Information about the removals companies that are to be used is available on UDintra.

The choice of removals company depends on the location of the mission.

In accordance with current practice, the posting must be for at least two years for travel and moving expenses to be covered.

**Removals and storage insurance**

The Ministry has a collective policy with If Skadeforsikring for removals and storage insurance, the costs of which are covered by the Ministry (see table in the appendix).

It is therefore not necessary for the posted employee to submit a request for insurance unless he or she would like higher insurance cover.

However, the insurance company should always be notified of individual items or groups of items that are valued at NOK 100 000 or higher. Jewellery and medals are not included in the removals insurance.

Employees who would like higher insurance cover should contact If Skadeforsikring directly. The additional premium will be invoiced directly by If Skadeforsikring, and the additional cost covered by the employee. In the event of damage to removal goods, the employee should contact If Skadeforsikring directly.

**Storage and insurance of household and personal belongings**

The removals company will arrange for storage of personal belongings in Norway. Please note that the shipping company used for removals to the Americas does not provide long-term storage. Storage is therefore provided by another firm.

The Ministry covers the cost of necessary storage of household and personal belongings during the whole posting and for three months after return. The Ministry also covers the cost of insuring stored goods for six months from date on which the goods are put into storage. Insurance beyond this period must be covered by the employee him/herself.

Removals to and from the storage facilities are carried out by the removals company. This is to be agreed directly between the employee and the company. The Ministry covers the cost of removal to and from the storage facility once only. The cost of transporting any additional loads to or from the storage facility must be covered by the employee.

In South and Central America, Africa, Asia and Australia, furnishing of living accommodation is government-funded. For employees who are moving into accommodation that is not fully (85 %) furnished, and who wish to store goods during their posting abroad, the Ministry will reimburse the rental expenses for storage space for up to 67.5 % of the maximum volume (see the table in the appendix for maximum volumes).

For employees moving into unfurnished accommodation, the Ministry will also cover the cost of storage for the difference between the permitted maximum volume and the actual removal volume. For example, if you are entitled to a maximum volume of 40 m³ and only bring 25 m³ goods, the cost of 15 m³ storage, i.e. the difference, will be covered.

**What may and may not be included in the shipment?**

The shipment must only contain the personal belongings of the posted employee and his or her accompanying family, including a reasonable amount of consumer products. It is not possible to include items for anyone else unless this has been cleared with the Section for Property Management in advance.

The following are not defined as removal goods and are not covered by the insurance: foodstuffs, alcohol, weapons and motor vehicles. It should be noted that the rules for what goods may be shipped have become stricter, and you should ask the removals company for detailed information.

Detailed information about exporting/importing motor vehicles and boats is published on the website of the Norwegian Customs (toll.no).

**Expenses in connection with baggage and baggage insurance during transfer to the mission**

The Ministry covers the cost of up to 30 kg of excess baggage, i.e. over and above the airline’s free allowance, for the posted employee and each family member. These expenses should be entered into the travel expenses system.

Cameras, computers, jewellery, etc. and goods containing liquid or other contents that could damage clothes must not be packed in baggage that is to be checked in. Any items of particular value must be insured privately by the posted employee.

Any damage to luggage will be covered by the airline. Compensation claims should be sent directly to the Section for Recruitment and Personnel in the Ministry: SECT- SECT-RecruitmentAndPersonnel@mfa.no.

**Expenses associated with pets**

The Ministry does not cover expenses associated with the vaccination, transport, quarantine, etc. of pets.

Information about importing pets to Norway can be found on the website of the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (mattilsynet.no).

You should contact the mission to which you are to be posted for information on the rules for importing pets to the country in question.

**Hotel accommodation in connection with a transfer abroad**

In cases where hotel accommodation is needed in connection with the transfer to or from the place of service, the cost of up to 17 days’ hotel accommodation for the posted employee and accompanying family members will be covered by the Ministry, provided that these expenses are documented. In Oslo, these expenses must be paid by the posted employee and then entered into the travel expenses system. Any hotel accommodation that is needed at the place of service should be agreed with the mission. These expenses are to be paid by the mission and entered into the mission’s accounts. A subsistence allowance may be awarded for up to 17 days.

If the posted employee takes annual leave in the former or new place of service, in connection with the transfer, the cost of hotel accommodation for up to seven days may be provided. This applies in cases where the employee needs some extra time off work to sort out practical matters connected with the move (e.g. looking for accommodation, settling children into their new school, etc.), and on the condition that hotel accommodation would have been necessary in any case, and would have been covered by the Ministry. Hotel accommodation in Norway in connection with a transfer to a mission in Europe is only covered for the period during which the household contents are being removed and the house is being cleaned. Hotel accommodation in Norway is not considered necessary when the shipment has arrived at the destination, or if the household contents are put into storage in Norway.

If the posted employee and accompanying family members choose to stay with friends or relatives rather than in a hotel in connection with the transfer, they will receive half the subsistence allowance (but no overnight allowance) in accordance with the above rules.

**Accommodation at the place of service**

It is the mission’s responsibility to find appropriate accommodation for posted employees. The mission will normally make the best possible use of the accommodation already at its disposal, and the posted employee will not automatically take over his or her predecessor’s accommodation. It should be noted that apart from the ambassador’s residence, no account is taken of seniority or status in this connection. The size and value of the accommodation are determined solely by the number of family members.

It is not normally possible to change your accommodation during your posting. If you arrive alone, but your family is planning to join you later, you must inform the mission of this fact so that you are given suitable accommodation for the whole family straight away.

The Ministry covers the rent and any running expenses that are not included in the rent, such as electricity, fuel, gas and water use. These expenses are normally paid by the mission directly.

For more information about accommodation, you should contact the mission to which you are to be posted. You should also contact the mission if you have questions about security or refurbishment.

*The mission will normally make the best possible use of the accommodation already at its disposal, and the posted employee will not automatically take over his or her predecessor’s accommodation*.

## 1.13 INSURANCE

The Norwegian state is self-insured, which means that, in general, government agencies may not take out private insurance to cover expenses incurred by unforeseen incidents. The state’s responsibility for its employees is largely regulated by collective agreements negotiated between the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation and the trade union confederations for state employees.

The state insurance and compensation schemes form part of the employment conditions for Ministry employees.

**Insurance during the moving process**

Insurance of belongings during the move to/from a mission/Norway is discussed under section 1.12. This includes insurance of goods during transport and storage.

**Accommodation at the place of service**

Home insurance (general liability insurance and insurance against fire, water damage, etc.) is covered by the mission.

**Household contents and personal belongings**

Each family must take out its own household contents insurance for personal belongings and baggage insurance for private holiday trips. Your Norwegian insurance policy may not be valid outside Norway, and you should check this with your Norwegian insurance company or, if relevant, your trade union.

**Accident insurance for accompanying family members**

Accompanying family members are covered by an accident insurance scheme administered by the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund. This applies to spouses/registered partners/cohabitants and children up to the age of 18 (or until the child completes upper secondary school) who accompany a Foreign Service employee on a posting abroad. Visiting family members are not covered.

The insurance is valid all over the world and for the entire stay abroad. This includes holidays and transit to the place of service, but not stays in Norway. The insurance gives a right to compensation of up to 20G (20 times the basic amount in the National Insurance Scheme) in the event of death or permanent disability. The compensation is paid out as a one-off payment. Expenses for necessary medical treatment are also covered unless these are covered by another insurance scheme. Injuries sustained as a result of terrorist acts, armed conflict, acts of war, riots, natural disasters and so on are also covered. More information is given in section 10.26 the Norwegian civil service handbook (*Statens personalhåndbok* – Norwegian only).

**Insurance schemes for employees**

Employees of the Norwegian state are covered by accident insurance under a special agreement on insurance and compensation for state employees on official travel or postings abroad. See section 9.24 of the Norwegian civil service handbook (*Statens personalhåndbok* – Norwegian only).

Employees in Norway are covered by the Occupational Injury Act and also have occupational injury insurance under the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund

Employees covered by the Basic Collective Agreement for the Civil Service are insured in the event of death under section 23 of the Agreement.

More information about insurance and compensation schemes for employees is available on UDintra (Norwegian only).

# PART 2: DURING THE STAY ABROAD

## 2.1 MEDICAL INFORMATION AND ADVICE AND MEDICAL TRANSPORT SERVICES

The Ministry has an agreement with the health telephone hotline Helsetelefonen (Norwegian only) (tel: +47 21 49 22 86), which offers medical advice 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Helsetelefonen is a low-threshold service that is easily available and provides simple, immediate advice and information on health, illness and treatment. The health telephone hotline answers all types of health-related questions.

You can also ring Helsetelefonen for general information and advice about health and illness, or to talk to a medical health worker about any health-related concerns.

The Ministry has an agreement with Europeiske Reiseforsikring on the provision of necessary medical transport to the nearest suitable treatment centre. The service is accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**What to do if you become seriously ill or are injured in an accident**:

* **Seek medical help from a local doctor/hospital.** In the event of a serious illness or accident, the posted employee or family member concerned should seek medical help from a doctor or hospital in the area. NB: Europeiske’s alarm centre should be contacted if there is any uncertainty about the diagnosis or medical treatment.
* **Guarantees and advances**. The mission normally guarantees payment to the hospital and pays treatment costs upfront for both the posted employee and accompanying family members. The mission then submits a claim to the Norwegian Health Economics Administration (Helfo) for reimbursement of these expenses. Europeiske can guarantee payment to the hospital for two days, or up to three days if the person is admitted on a Friday or Saturday.
* **Nearest suitable treatment centre.** Europeiske’s alarm centre can assess whether the necessary treatment can be provided at the treatment centre where the patient is, or whether it is necessary to arrange transport to, and treatment at, another more suitable treatment centre**.** Transport to, and treatment in, Norway is only provided in exceptional cases. If treatment cannot be provided locally, the local doctor or Europeiske must confirm this in writing. This written confirmation is necessary in order for Helfo to reimburse travel expenses to another treatment centre or another country.
* **Treatment in Norway.** Members of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme may choose to travel to Norway and have the cost of treatment covered in accordance with the National Insurance Act, but travel expenses to and from Norway are not covered**.**
* **Medical transport services**. Under the Ministry's agreement with Europeiske Reiseforsikring, Europeiske’s alarm centre coordinates medical transport to the nearest suitable treatment centre. All transport must be cleared with the Ministry in advance.
* **Europeiske’s alarm centre** has an extensive database and an extensive international network. It evaluates treatment centres and arranges admissions and transport.
* **Coordination.** Europeiske’s alarm centre coordinates as necessary between the patient, the family abroad and in Norway, the hospital/doctor, the transport service and the Ministry.
* **The Europeiske app** gives direct telephone access to Europeiske’s alarm centre and the health telephone hotline Helsetelefonen. It can be downloaded from the App Store.

*IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS:*

*Health telephone hotline (Helsetelefonen): +47 21 49 22 86*

*Europeiske’s alarm centre: +47 21 49 50 00*

## 2.2 MEMBERSHIP OF THE NORWEGIAN NATIONAL INSURANCE SCHEME, HEALTH COVERAGE

**Membership of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme**

* To be entitled to benefits, you must be a member of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme. If you are resident in Norway, you are, as a general rule, a member of the National Insurance Scheme, but people staying outside Norway can also retain their membership under certain conditions.
* Posted employees are automatically compulsory members of the National Insurance Scheme during their stay abroad. Norwegian citizens (or citizens of other EEA countries) employed in the service of the Norwegian state are compulsory members of the National Insurance Scheme during their stay abroad, see section 2-5 of the National Insurance Act.
* Accompanying spouses and children who are dependent on a posted employee are also compulsory members of the National Insurance Scheme. The same applies to registered partners or cohabitants (couples who live together who have or have had children together, or who were previously married to each other). The spouse, registered partner or cohabitant must be a Norwegian citizen or citizen of an EEA country. You should notify NAV if you are receiving or will receive employment income during the stay abroad, as the amount of income you receive will affect whether you can be considered ‘dependent’ or not.

**Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who are not Norwegian or EEA citizens**

* An accompanying spouse/registered partner/cohabitant who is not a Norwegian or EEA citizen cannot have compulsory membership of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme, but can apply for voluntary membership.
* In order to be entitled to voluntary membership, the spouse/registered partner/cohabitant must have been a member of the National Insurance Scheme for at least three of the preceding five calendar years, and he or she must also have close links to Norway.
* Accompanying spouses/registered partners/cohabitants and children under 18 years of age who are dependent on a posted employee are entitled to have some or all of their necessary health care expenses covered (regardless of whether they are members of the National Insurance Scheme), in accordance with chapter 5 of the National Insurance Act. This is an important right for spouses/registered partners/cohabitants who are not Norwegian or EEA citizens and who have not been members of the National Insurance Scheme for three of the previous five years, and are thus not entitled to voluntary membership.
* Au pairs who accompany the family abroad may also apply for voluntary membership of the National Insurance Scheme. The posted employee is then the official employer and must pay tax to the National Insurance Scheme.

**Benefits under the National Insurance Scheme during a stay abroad – health services**

Helfo (the Health Economics Administration) safeguards key health rights and refunds health care expenses that are covered by the National Insurance Act.

Helfo does not refund health care expenses that are regulated by legislation other than the National Insurance Act (for example expenses associated with health aids).

The overseas allowance granted under the Special Agreement on Allowances, Benefits and Remuneration in the Foreign Service is intended to cover higher living expenses connected with transfers to and service at a Norwegian diplomatic or consular mission, including health care expenses that are not covered by Helfo.

* If you are going to an EEA country, you need to get an E106 entitlement form (which confirms your healthcare rights) from Helfo before you travel. The application form is available on *helsenorge.no*. It should be sent together with the relevant documents to: Helfo, Postboks 2415, 3104 Tønsberg.
* The Ministry has signed a collective health insurance agreement with certain EEA countries, (as of 2017 these are: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the UK). The missions are responsible for enrolment in the insurance scheme. Membership is voluntary. The insurance premium paid by the Ministry is to be reported to the Norwegian tax authorities.

*Applications for voluntary membership of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme are dealt with by NAV.*

*Applications should be submitted well before your departure date.*

*NAV International telephone helpline: (+ 47) 21 07 37 00, open Monday to Friday, 08:00-15.30.*

**Outside the EEA and in certain EEA countries (**Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), the National Insurance Scheme rules on extended subsidisation (*utvidet stønad*) apply. This means that expenses for necessary hospital stays and treatment are covered in full. Helfo covers 75 % of expenses for necessary:

1. outpatient treatment and other medical care outside a hospital
2. radiological examinations and treatment
3. tests at medical laboratories
4. psychological treatment
5. physiotherapy
6. dental care in connection with dental disease, but not orthodontic treatment.

In addition, the National Insurance Scheme covers travel expenses to the nearest suitable treatment centre. In cases where there is a documented need for the patient to be accompanied, the travel expenses for the accompanying person will also be covered. You must always contact Europeiske for advice on which hospital to go to. More information on the Ministry’s agreement with Europeiske is given in section 2.1 above.

If required, proof of membership of the National Insurance Scheme can be obtained from Helfo using the form on [helsenorge.no](https://helsenorge.no/bo-i-utlandet/posted-workers-outside-the-eu-eea?redirect=false).

Under the National Insurance Act, the employer is required to pay for treatment that is covered by the National Insurance Scheme and can then apply to Helfo for reimbursement afterwards. In practice, it is the missions that pay for treatment and then submit a claim to Helfo for reimbursement of medical expenses, for both posted employees and the accompanying spouse/cohabitant and children. It does not make any difference whether private or public health services are used.

Helfo is unable to indicate in advance whether a particular treatment is covered or whether the expenses will be reimbursed. Applications must be sent in at a later stage.

Families staying in the US can have their medical expenses reimbursed by the American insurance company Equian, which acts on behalf of Helfo. Missions are responsible for registering employees with Equian and for cancelling registrations.

**Child benefit and cash-for-care benefit**

* Child benefit is granted unless prevented by a bilateral social security agreement. Contact your local NAV office for more information.
* Both parents must be members of the National Insurance Scheme.
* If you are going to an EEA country and have questions about cash-for-care benefit, contact your local NAV office.
* Families living outside the EEA are not entitled to receive cash-for-care benefit.

**Parental benefit**

* Both parents must have been in paid employment for six of the previous 10 months before the birth to receive parental benefit.
* The parents’ previous incomes must have been above a certain level.
* Mothers who are not entitled to parental benefit are entitled to a lump-sum grant.
* Fathers have an independent right to paternal leave.
* Fathers who wish to take leave for a longer period than the paternal quota may only do so if the mother is in paid employment or following a full-time officially approved educational programme. It is also a condition that the father is the one looking after the child.

**Pensions**

* Entitlement to a pension larger than the minimum pension level under the National Insurance Scheme is based on income. Only those who have been in paid employment are entitled to a supplementary pension.
* Accompanying spouses/cohabitants may under certain conditions be granted pension points for child care. They must be members of the National Insurance Scheme and receiving child benefit for the child in question.
* If the accompanying spouse/cohabitant is in paid employment in the country of service, this could have consequences for his/her membership in the National Insurance Scheme. If the accompanying spouse/cohabitant is employed by a company whose headquarters is in Norway, he/she may under certain conditions be able to retain his/her membership and accrue Norwegian pension rights. If the accompanying spouse/cohabitant works for a foreign employer, he/she may be able to accrue pension rights in the country where he/she is working. It is up to the individual concerned to find out about this.
* Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who are members of the Norwegian Public Service Pension Fund will be credited with up to four years’ pensionable earnings if they accompany a Foreign Service employee on a posting abroad (see also section 1.11 on leave for spouses/cohabitants from their own jobs).

**The Ministry’s pension for accompanying spouses/cohabitants**

* In 1999, the Ministry introduced a special pension scheme for accompanying spouses. As of 1 January 2017, the scheme also covers cohabitants. This applies to couples who live together and who have, or have had, children together, or who were previously married to each other.
* The accompanying spouse/cohabitant must have accompanied the Foreign Service employee on postings abroad for a period of at least 10 years. Full pension rights are accrued after 20 years.
* In cases where the accompanying spouse/cohabitant’s primary employment is as a member of mission staff and his/her annual salary exceeds the average National Insurance Scheme basic amount for that year, this period of service is not included when calculating pension rights.
* You do not have to be a Norwegian national or a member of the National Insurance Scheme to be entitled to the pension.
* The pension for accompanying spouses/cohabitants is not coordinated with any other type of pension.
* The pension is paid out from the month in which the accompanying spouse/cohabitant turns 67.
* There is no membership fee.
* Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who are entitled to the pension, should send an email to the Section for Recruitment and Personnel (SECT-RecruitmentAndPersonnel@mfa.no), in the calendar year before they turn 67. The email should include the following information: name of the missions concerned, length of time as accompanying spouse/cohabitant in months and years, any periods of absence from the place of service that exceed three months, and details of any work undertaken as a member of locally employed staff.
* The relevant legislation is available on lovdata.no – Norwegian only (*Lov om ledsagerpensjon i utenrikstjenesten)*

**Loss or reduction of rights to benefits under the National Insurance Scheme on return to Norway**

**Unemployment benefit**

The right to unemployment benefit depends on certain conditions, including loss of employment income. Special rules for acquiring rights to benefits apply in the EEA. Most accompanying spouses/cohabitants will not be entitled to unemployment benefit.

**Sickness benefit**

* To be entitled to receive sickness benefit under the National Insurance Scheme, you must have had a pensionable employment income above a certain minimum level and been in employment for at least four weeks immediately prior to the date on the sick leave certificate. You should therefore be aware that you risk not being entitled to sickness benefit on your return to Norway.
* Accompanying spouses/cohabitants on leave from a position in the central government administration may have more rights. The same applies to those who have had Norwegian pensionable income in another country from employment in a Norwegian company whose headquarters are in Norway.

**Work assessment allowance**

Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who have reduced working capacity on their return to Norway and who fulfil the other conditions may be entitled to receive a work assessment allowance.

**Disability benefit**

Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who on return to Norway have permanently reduced earning capacity due to illness or injury may, under certain conditions, be entitled to receive disability benefit under the National Insurance Scheme.

*REIMBURSEMENT OF HEALTH EXPENSES DURING A STAY ABROAD*

*If you are going to an EEA country, you need to get an E106 entitlement form (which confirms your healthcare rights) from Helfo before you leave Norway in order to get any health expenses reimbursed. The application form is available on* [*helsenorge.no*](https://helsenorge.no/health-rights-abroad/posted-workers-in-the-eu-eea-and-switzerland)*. However, in certain EEA countries, you are entitled to extended subsidisation (utvidet stønad) under the National Insurance Scheme. Information about which countries this applies to is given under section 2.2 on page 17.*

## 2.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PAID EMPLOYMENT AT THE PLACE OF SERVICE

There are very limited opportunities for paid employment at the missions. The head of mission’s spouse/cohabitant is not permitted to take paid employment.

Under the EEA Agreement, all EEA nationals have the right to work within the EEA.

One of the objectives of the Ministry’s family policy is to help enable accompanying spouses/cohabitants who wish to do so to work during the stay abroad, both in EEA countries and outside the EEA. In this connection, Norway has entered into a number of bilateral agreements on work permits for accompanying family members.

As of 2017, agreements have been signed with Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, India, Israel (administrative scheme), Romania, South Africa (administrative scheme), Turkey, the UK and the US.

Accompanying spouses/cohabitants who have employment income during their stay abroad should be aware that this may affect their membership of the National Insurance Scheme. Accompanying spouses/cohabitants should always contact NAV (tel: + 47 21 07 37 00, opening hours: 08:00-15:30) if they are thinking of remaining in or seeking new paid employment.

## PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES

Accompanying family members enjoy the same privileges and immunities as posted employees, as long as they are not nationals of the country of service. If a family member takes paid employment, these immunities and privileges do not normally apply when the family member concerned is engaged in work-related activities. However, you must obtain the Ministry’s consent to waive your privileges and immunities in connection with your job.

Posted employees and accompanying family members have a duty to respect the legislation and rules of both Norway and the country of service.

The privileges and immunities referred to here follow from the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. As the conventions set out, the purpose of these privileges and immunities is not to benefit individuals and their families, but to ensure the efficient performance of the functions of ‘diplomatic missions as representing States’ and of ‘consular posts on behalf of their respective States’. The privileges and immunities may only be waived with the consent of the sending state. If an accompanying family member behaves in a way that is incompatible with the posted employee’s diplomatic status, this could put the Ministry and the Norwegian authorities in a difficult position.

## 2.5 SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DEPENDENCY

A posting abroad can entail both positive and negative challenges for the whole family. Settling in a new country, getting to know a new culture, meeting new people, being a long way from home – all of this can be exciting and interesting, but it can also be a difficult and lonely time.

Accompanying spouses/cohabitants will encounter alcohol at work-related functions and events during a posting abroad. It may be wise to plan how often/how much you intend to drink on different occasions, how many alcohol-free days you intend to have, etc. This applies both to the posted employee and to the accompanying spouse/cohabitant. Some people may turn to other substances or resort to other forms of addictive behaviour (computer games, gambling or other online activities) as a way of coping with what may be a very different life .

Early intervention reduces the risk of problems and/or dependency. Reporting a concern is a way of showing that you care. It also means that we, as the employer, can act quickly to help.

The Ministry has been working to prevent and alleviate problems associated with substance abuse and dependency for many years. As an accompanying spouse/cohabitant, you may well be the first to see that your spouse/partner could have problems related to substance abuse and dependency. In such cases, it is important and right to seek help if you are worried. You can for example go to the head of mission, who will then raise the matter with the employee in question. You can also contact the HSE adviser at the Ministry for advice and guidance (email: lisbet.egeberg@mfa.no, tel. +47 239 51156).

As an accompanying spouse/cohabitant with diplomatic status, it is important to remember that you too represent Norway and that a certain standard of behaviour is therefore expected of you. If you find yourself in a situation where you need help or guidance, it may be a good idea to contact your doctor in the first instance. If you are registered at an address in Norway while you are abroad, you can also contact your own doctor (GP) in Norway, who can refer you as appropriate.

# PART 3: PREPARING TO RETURN TO NORWAY

*Some children find it difficult to start at or return to a school in Norway after several years abroad.*

## 3.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORK ON RETURN

On returning to Norway, you may find that your right to benefits under the National Insurance Scheme has been lost or reduced. More details are given under the section 2.2 on the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme on page 19.

If you do not have a job to return to, for example if you have not been granted a period of leave from your place of work in Norway to accompany your spouse/cohabitant abroad, you should start looking out for job advertisements as the time of your return to Norway approaches.

If you want help getting back to work again, you can register as a job seeker on *nav.no*. Experience has shown that maintaining close contact with your professional network in Norway can also be very useful.

## 3.2 STUDYING DURING YOUR STAY ABROAD

ANSA, the Association of Norwegian Students Abroad, has a network that can help you to make contact with potential employers on your return. It also arranges events such as career days.

## 3.3 CHILDREN RETURNING TO NORWAY

Some children find it difficult to start at or return to school in Norway after several years abroad. The Ministry has prepared a pamphlet entitled ‘You have a new pupil in the class’ (*Du har fått en ny elev i klassen* – Norwegian only), which provides advice to schools on how they can help children settle in to their new school. The pamphlet is available on the family portal on *regjeringen.no.* It is a good idea to print it out and send it to your child’s new school.

## 3.4 RIGHT TO A SCHOOL PLACE IN NORWAY

Primary and lower secondary education are compulsory in Norway. Children and young people are entitled to receive public primary and lower secondary education in accordance with the Education Act and associated regulations. Primary and lower secondary pupils have the right to attend the school closest to their home or a school in the catchment area to which they belong.

Norwegian schools cannot hold a place for a child while you are abroad, and you can only apply for a place once the family has moved back to its registered address in Norway (this also applies to families who move internally in Norway). However, the Ministry recommends that families contact the school before they return home. If it would be helpful for the family, the Ministry can write to the school asking it to take account of the child’s and the family’s need for predictability on their return to Norway. You can contact the Section for Recruitment and Personnel (SECT-RecruitmentAndPersonnel@mfa.no) for advice and guidance.

## 3.5 MEETING FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN RETURNING TO NORWAY

Once a year, the Ministry arranges a meeting for parents to discuss difficulties they may encounter on their return to Norway. The meeting is led by a psychologist.

*FAMILY POLICY COMMITTEE*

*The family policy committee is an advisory body in the Ministry made up of representatives of the employer, the civil service organisations and UD-partnerne. UD-partnerne is an interest group for accompanying spouses/ cohabitants. It can be contacted by email at:* *UDpartnerne@yahoo.no**.*

APPENDIX – SIZE OF SHIPMENT

In accordance with current practice, the posting abroad must last for at least two years for travel and moving expenses to be covered.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Position**  |  | **Volume m3, posted employee**  | **Volume m3,accompanying spouse /cohabitant**  | **Volume m3,each accompanying child**  | **Insurance cover (in NOK)**  |
| Head of mission, permitted size of shipment |  | 32.5 m³ |  |  | 1 300 000 |
| storage  |  | 67.5 m³  |
| Min. counsellor/consul  | Unfurnished Furnished  | 40.013.0 | 10.03.5 | 2.51.0 | 1 300 0001 300 000 |
| Embassy sec./consul II  | Unfurnished Furnished  | 35.011.5 | 9.03.0 | 2.51.0 | 1 100 0001 100 000 |
| Adm.personnel  | Unfurnished Furnished  | 30.010.0 | 7.52.5 | 2.51.0 | 1 100 0001 100 000 |

The permitted shipment volume for an accompanying spouse/cohabitant is approximately 25 % of the permitted volume for the posted employee, and the permitted volume for each accompanying child is up to 2.5 m³. There is no allowance for au pairs.

For removals to and from Africa, the permitted volume for accompanying children is twice the normal allowance for children.

According to the Foreign Service Instructions (Norwegian only), each employee is allowed only one shipment. However, the Ministry recognises that shipments may have to be split up for various reasons (e.g. the spouse/cohabitant’s job, children’s educational needs), and therefore takes a flexible approach to this. Any splitting up of shipments must be cleared beforehand with the Ministry.

NOTES

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