

PE2085/I: Introduce a statutory definition of residency for Fatal Accident Inquiries into the deaths of Scots abroad

Minister for Victims and Violence Against Women and Girls written submission, 16 December 2024

Thank you for your letter to the Lord Chancellor of 13 November requesting information on coroner investigations into deaths abroad to support the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's consideration of petition PE2085 concerning Fatal Accident Investigations into deaths abroad. I am responding as the Minister responsible for coroner policy and law in England and Wales.

As you are aware, coroners are independent judicial office holders who investigate reported deaths that are suspected to have been violent or unnatural, to have an unknown cause, or to have occurred in prison or other types of state detention. The coroner's jurisdiction is based solely on the deceased person's body lying within their coroner area. Therefore, where a person dies outside England and Wales, and regardless of whether they were previously resident, the coroner's jurisdiction is engaged if the body enters the coroner area and the death is reported to the coroner. The coroner's duty to investigate is then triggered in line with the criteria set out above. Where, prior to inquest, the cause of death is established to have been natural, the coroner can (subject to certain conditions) discontinue the investigation without proceeding to an inquest.

You have requested information on the annual number of inquests into deaths abroad since 2016. It may be helpful to mention that this department publishes annual Coroner Statistics each May, covering the preceding calendar year – the series is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coroners-and-burials-statistics>. For ease of reference, I have enclosed an annex setting out the requested information and, for additional context, the total number of reported deaths and inquests opened each year.

You have also asked for information on the number of these cases in which a Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report was issued. As you will know, a coroner must issue a PFD report if they consider an investigation has revealed that action could be taken to mitigate or prevent the risk of future deaths.

Since 2021, the annual Coroner Statistics have included the number of PFD reports issued in the preceding calendar year, and this information is also summarised in the annex. We do not hold information on how many PFD reports relate to investigations into deaths which occurred abroad. However, all PFD reports and the responses to them must be copied to the Chief Coroner, who publishes them on the Judiciary website at: https://www.judiciary.uk/?s=&pfd_report_type=&post_type=pfd&order=relevance.

It may also be helpful to mention the Preventable Deaths Tracker, administered by Dr Georgia Richards at King's College London, which uses web-scraping techniques to enable data from PFD reports to be aggregated for analysis by public and academic bodies. The tracker is available at: <https://preventabledeathstracker.net/> – access to the full range of its functions may attract a fee.

Yours Sincerely

ALEX DAVIES-JONES MP
Minister for Victims and Violence Against Women and Girls

Annex

Deaths Abroad Reported to the Coroner, 2016 – 2023

Year	Deaths abroad reported to the Coroner	Total number of deaths reported to the Coroner	Inquests concluded on deaths abroad	Total number of inquests concluded
2016	1,849	241,211	405	40,504
2017	2,094	229,700	485	33,900
2018	2,145	220,600	355	30,700
2019	1,939	210,900	395	31,300
2020	771	205,400	269	30,900
2021	725	195,200	209	32,300
2022	1,474	208,400	190	35,600
2023	1,561	195,000	277	39,500

Notes

1. Death abroad is one that occurred outside England and Wales
2. Not all deaths reported to a Coroner result in an inquest
3. An inquest can conclude in a different year to when reported
4. Statistics on deaths abroad can be found here: [Coroners Statistics Annual 2023 Tables.ods](#)

Prevention of Future Death Reports, 2021 – 2023

Year	Number of Prevention of Future Death Reports Issued
2021	440
2022	403
2023	569