

Message to the foreign Community – Safe Communities Portugal

In our capacity as a qualified Civil Protection Volunteer organisation serving the foreign community in Portugal, this message aims to outline the services SCP is providing during the Coronavirus outbreak.

There is little doubt that we are all becoming more accustomed to a change of life as a result of Covid-19, and the effects of necessary laws and measures that have been put in place.

These changes will be with us for some time to come. How long this takes is up to us. If we stay at home, except for essential trips, it will be over much quicker. If we stay home, the risk of us and our families being infected, is much reduced. And, if we stay home, we will greatly help the nurses, doctors and emergency services, upon whom, we all depend.

The Portuguese government should be applauded for its timely and resolute actions by introducing measures to help mitigate the situation. They have often rightly been complimented through responses we receive, together with the nurses, doctors, security forces and all those putting themselves at risk to help others.

Within the community there is a general sense of responsibility, civic mindedness and determination to overcome this and get back to a normal way of life as soon as possible. There is fantastic work being undertaken by charities and other volunteers throughout Portugal, from making donations to providing support to those in need. Please support them.

The part that Safe Communities Portugal is playing

Our volunteer team of professionals, at Safe Communities Portugal, has been there since day one – our first post was on 20th January.

Since then we have further developed our capacity by creating a core response team: Chris Stretton, Elise Slotte and myself, all of us having crisis management experience. This is supported by a volunteer group of around 12 people including former UK government health professionals, civil protection and cybersecurity specialists and an international lawyer, all providing input and support services. The chart shows how SCP works together, 7 days a week; the core response team communicating through video conferencing.

Our daily work involves liaising with government and Tourism boards where necessary. We have made proposals to help the foreign community at national and local Algarve level; these being considered and implemented where appropriate. We liaise closely with various Embassies and in particular the British Embassy Consular team who are very supportive. Official travel information can be found on the Gov.UK travel advice website - Portugal page, which is essential reading if you are travelling. This, and other useful information is regularly updated. Please visit the Brits in Portugal Facebook page which also contains important information.

SCP Website

The focus point of the official information and advice in English is on the Coronavirus Covid-19 section on the SCP. We make regular Facebook posts with links to the site.

However, not everyone uses social media, so this article and our newsletter is to help those who do not. On the site we have 15 pages dedicated to this subject including the following:

Daily Situation Reports –

Known as SITREPS these are produced each day at 0900hrs, covering Portugal and separately for the Algarve, Madeira and Acores. These are provided mainly by experts, for the information being covered, so are different from news items.

Latest News – This is up to date news from various sources including government announcements and local Portuguese and English media reports which have been verified before publication. These are posted throughout the day covering important developments

Legislation Page – This contains the main Decree Laws, including the Extended State of Emergency legislation. There are (informal) English translations and links to the original laws in Portuguese supplemented by questions and answers where possible. There are many so we focus on the main ones.

“What is it? “How to protect ourselves”, “Health Authority DGS”, “Dealing with Suspected Confirmed cases” are the pages where official information from DGS can be found in English. These contain for example, essential hygiene information, how to use the SNS 24 line and online symptom analysis available through DGS; with links to specific DGS/WHO information in English.

“True or False?” This page establishes an internationally used guidelines, simplified to show how journalists determine where news is “True” or “False”. This is important, as there is much false and misleading information being circulated especially on Facebook. Check before posting or sharing.

Positive News – This contains comments of “hope” and inspiration, selected from our Facebook page. Good to read on particular dark days or when people are feeling understandably low.

“FAQ page”. These provide an extensive range of questions and answers to help people, obtained from official sources and put together in a more simplified format. As we are experiencing a rapidly changing situation, these should also be read together with latest advice from DGS.

The **Help and Contacts page** provides over 70 contact points where further official information help services can be found.

Lastly by following government advice, in particularly the Stay at Home message, we will come through this quicker and with less casualties and return to a way of life we all desire. The message is clear.

