L 11. Status, composition and activities of consular institutions

L12. Legal status of a freelance Consul

L 13. Diplomatic law of international organizations

L 14. The problem of diplomatic etiquette and protocol

L 15. Diplomat and Consul

**Consul**, in [foreign service](https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-service), a public officer who is commissioned by a state to reside in a foreign country for the purpose of fostering the commercial affairs of its citizens in that foreign country and performing such routine functions as issuing visas and renewing passports. A consul, as such, does not enjoy the status of a diplomat and cannot enter on his official duties until permission has been granted to him by the authorities of the state to which his nomination has been communicated. This permission, or [exequatur](https://www.britannica.com/topic/exequatur), may be revoked at any time at the discretion of the government of the country in which he resides.

The modern office of consul is derived from that of certain magistrates in the cities of [medieval](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medieval) Italy, Provence, and Languedoc charged with the settlement of trade disputes. With the growth of trade, it early became convenient to appoint agents with similar powers in foreign parts, and these often, though not invariably, were styled consuls.

It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the system developed universally. The French system, under which the consular service had been long established as part of the general [civil service](https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-service), was gradually adopted by other nations.

Consular officials are generally ranked, in descending order of importance, as consul general, consul, vice consul, or honorary consul. Few countries can afford the cost of career officers at every consular post, and the [corps](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/corps) of career officials is therefore supplemented by honorary officers, usually residents engaged in trade, who are citizens either of the country that nominates them or of that in which they reside.

Consuls do not enjoy [diplomatic immunity](https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomatic-immunity) but are to some extent exempt from the jurisdiction of the receiving state. The archives, for example, all other official documents and papers kept in a consulate, and all correspondence between the consul and his government are inviolable. Consuls are also often exempt from all kinds of rates and taxes and from personal taxes. The precise extent of such consular privileges is usually established in [bilateral](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/bilateral) and multilateral agreements known as consular conventions. Many of these have been superseded by the Convention on Consular Relations (Vienna, 1963).