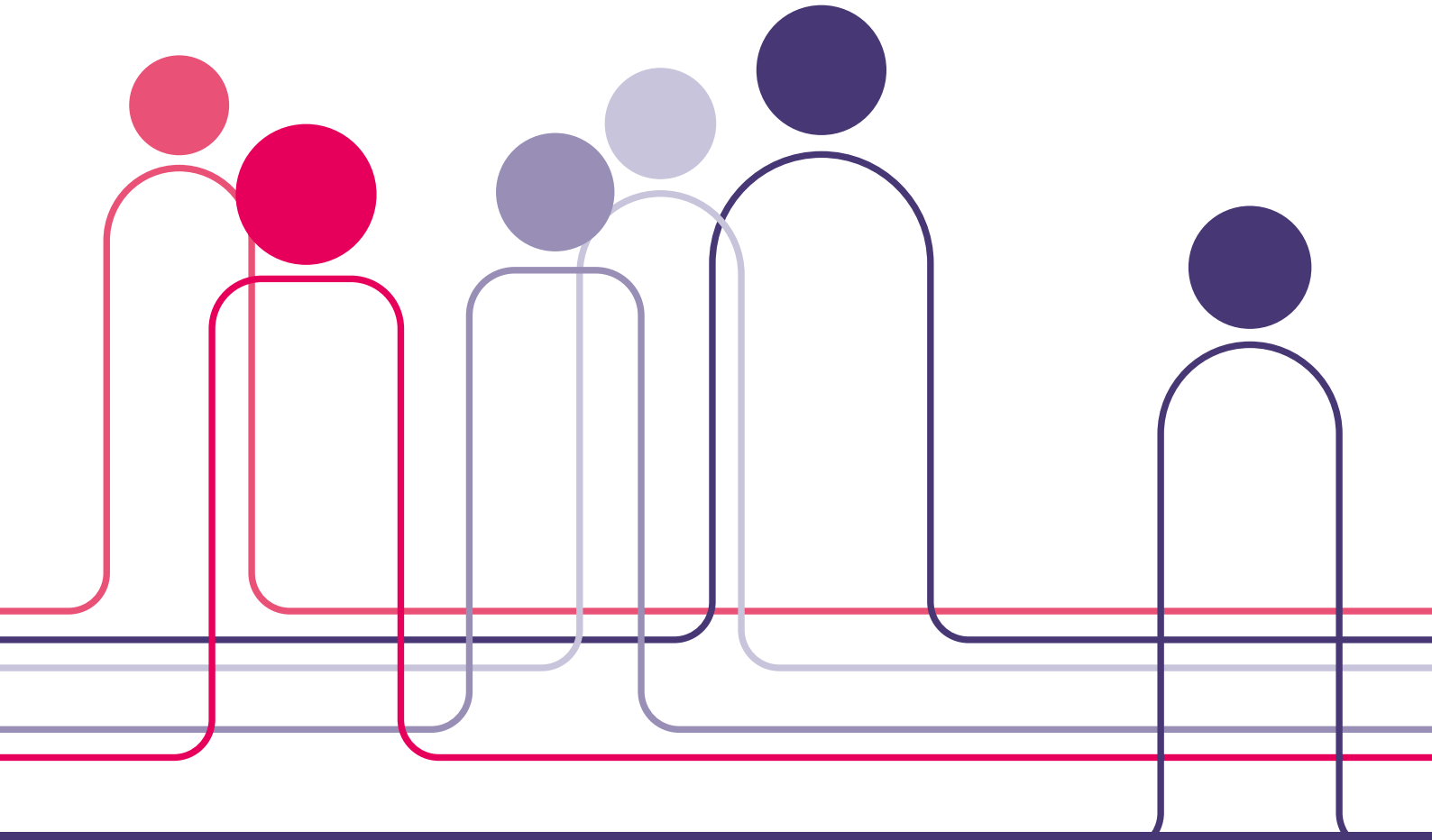
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Working online with clients outside the UK



Checklist

Ethics Essentials

Legal, ethical and practical considerations for BACP members thinking of working with clients in other countries.

Legal considerations

UK GDPR, data protection and ICO regulation

We recommend that you consider:

The applicable law within the country outside the UK

- the regulations governing counselling and psychotherapy in the country where your client lives. You can contact the licensing or regulatory board for permission to practise if needed.
- note keeping – are there any statutory requirements for keeping records in the country the client lives in?
- are there any legal implications for clients wanting to access notes in the country they live in?
- is there a duty to disclose self-harm or safeguarding concerns in the country you'll be working in?
- is there any legislation relating to work with children and young people or other vulnerable client groups in the country where your client lives?

Data protection

- data protection laws differ outside the UK, so it is your responsibility to keep your own, and your clients, personal data safe in accordance with these laws
- online safety and the appropriate use of online platforms and cyber security – include checking the privacy and data protection settings of the platform you are using
- each EU country has its own equivalent of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). You may need to be registered with them to work with their citizens. Countries outside the EU also have their own data protection laws that you will need to abide by

- living in the UK you will also need to follow UK law in respect of the records you keep in respect of international clients (see the ICO website for more information)

- the retention of notes – are there any limitations or expectations of how long you will retain your notes in the country where you are working?

Making the agreement with your client

- how you will contract with the client for the work, and will you need to include a jurisdiction section?

- are there any requirements in the country you are working in relating to contracts for service?

Confidentiality

- who can legally request notes and client information when working with clients in specific countries?

- if you're working for an online counselling platform based outside the UK how will this platform keep your personal information, and your client's records confidential?

- if the client is being seen in their own country's mental health, or multi-disciplinary, service will these services require you to share information?

Safeguarding

- check regulatory bodies for safeguarding procedures in the country your client lives in

- how would you report a crime in the country your client lives in?

- check with your own local authority for advice regarding any safeguarding concerns

- agree a possible safety plan with a client to help reduce risks.

Insurance

- do you have cover in the country you're working in – insurance companies differ in what cover they offer for international working?
- look carefully at the level of cover your policy gives when you're working online or abroad
- report any concerns such as safeguarding to your insurer without delay
- what will happen if a claim is made against you while you're working with clients abroad?

Make contact with regulatory and membership bodies outside the UK

- to see if any paperwork needs completing
- to understand if there are any specific permissions that are needed to work in that country – countries vary greatly, and in some countries, or US states, you may not be able to work unless you are licensed.

Ethical considerations

We recommend that before taking on international clients you undertake a risk assessment, which includes considering:

The vulnerability of the client:

- what health and mental health resources are available in the country your client lives in?
- what support networks does the client have locally?
- whether you have a contact name and number to contact in case of emergency
- what is the process for out-of-session emergency contact?
- is the client at risk of harming themselves or others?
- consider the risks of working with children, young people or adults who could be perceived as vulnerable who live outside the UK.

Your qualifications and competency

- working online requires additional skills to working in person – check BACP's online and phone therapy competence framework to help you assess your competency
- what level of qualification will you need to work internationally – different countries have different requirements, including for some countries the need for a counselling, psychotherapy or psychology based Master or Doctoral qualification?
- Am I the best person to work with this client or would a local therapist be more appropriate for the client's needs?

Support of the client

- how might you get your client additional support if needed?
- what could you do to support your client if they have a crisis?
- what would you need to do if your client is at risk of harm?
- research options for referral if the work needs to come to an end.

Check out with your supervisor

- whether they would be happy to support your international work
- if your supervisor is not experienced in working with international clients, what impact will this have on your work?
- what other issues they might consider important to supervision of international clients.

Practical considerations

We recommend that you consider:

- time zones – will this impact your sessions?
- the venue of the client – do they have a private space to talk?
- the cancellation policy when working in different time zones

- any limitations to confidentiality within the country where your client lives – some countries routinely monitor online interactions, including video calls
- what will you do if out-of-session contact is needed?
- what will happen if you (the practitioner) are not available?
- who will activate your clinical will if something happens to you and you have clients outside the UK?
- how will you manage payment for therapy? It may involve different currencies and changing exchange rates
- how issues around internet connectivity might impact the work.

Language barriers

- do you speak the same language as your client? If not, will an interpreter be needed?
- do medical or other professionals in the country you're working in speak a language you understand? If not, how might this impact if for instance you need to contact them in an emergency?
- would it be helpful to have contact with a local therapist in the country you are working in and engage in networking with other practitioners working internationally?

Cultural competence

- consider that, culturally, language can have a different meaning
- consider any religious beliefs and cultural differences
- be careful not to make assumptions based on UK culture
- be aware of difference in attitudes towards diversity and the countries' laws in respect of gender, sexuality, disability, race and other characteristics, which in the UK are protected
- be aware of cultural diversity
- be aware of language and societal differences
- Consider how collaborative working as identified in the *Ethical Framework 2026*, might be impacted by any cultural differences.

Location

- make sure you have up-to-date location details for the client
- wars, conflict, violence and natural disasters affect many countries – how might this affect your work with a client?
- privacy – how able is the client to talk with you from a private space?

Emergency contact

- have emergency contact numbers and local details of medical and mental health professionals.

Complaints

- where can the client go if they need to make a complaint and how can BACP's Professional Conduct Procedure be accessed by a client if they live outside the UK?

Further resources can be found at: www.bacp.co.uk/eip

EiP 008 *Cross-border working in the counselling professions.*

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