

Departure Handover and Return

04 February 2025

Key points

- DO consider which information will help your successor to step into the job seamlessly and continue the specific tasks that support the operation
- DO start compiling documents, emails, other information from arrival and fill in the handover template as you go, to avoid the handover becoming a burden at the end of the mission
- DO NOT schedule a handover briefing after departure but provide your contact details and offer to answer specific inquiries
- DO arrange a farewell gathering to mark the completion of your mission, to reflect on the experience and give thanks for the support
- DO anticipate your return home and to your regular duties and plan to take a break after departure to ease the transition

1. Overview

A well-organized handover ensures that work continues with minimal interruption after a change of incumbent. It is considered good practice to compile a file or folder with essential information such as background material, key documents and a list of contacts, for an incoming manager to understand the job, the specific concerns and to connect with the right people. This 'package' is especially valuable if the handover cannot be conducted in person, and it can be complemented well with a Teams call.

The period of handover is also the time to prepare for departure and re-entry into regular life and work. The transition from a high-pressure emergency assignment to the regular environment should not be neglected and given some thought to prevent taking the stress home.

This section compiles recommendations on handover and return after emergency missions.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

In fast moving emergency operations, a structured handover is particularly important to avoid losing valuable time in the transition between two position incumbents. If there is no overlap of current and new incumbent, the information regarding the specific job must be transmitted through other means, foremost as paper and electronic files and documents. A file with key documents and reading material will benefit a successor in taking over the function quickly and continuing to support the emergency operation effectively. Ideally, the handover file should be made available even before arrival, through email or by providing a link to an online folder, to save time and give a head start to the new incumbent. Offering a Teams call after sharing the handover file to answer specific questions will enhance the quality of the handover.

3. Main guidance

Handover

An organized handover is an essential part of a successful mission. It should not be seen as a one-time action but builds on continued, mutual interaction with colleagues, including non-ERT and local colleagues who remain. In case there is no successor in an international capacity, the handover and transition could be done to a national colleague, or responsibilities could be distributed to two or more staff (do not assume that the colleagues already know all details of the job you performed).

If a personal handover is feasible, schedule an introduction of the new incumbent through face-to-face meetings with internal and external counterparts. This effort will pay off since personal meetings are usually more effective in establishing rapport and trust.

If there is no overlap of incumbent and successor, the incumbent should inform internal and external counterparts personally or in writing of the incoming replacement with name (if known) and function ahead of the arrival and encourage welcome and support.

In case too many constraints prevent the compilation of a handover package, arrange at least a Teams call with the successor to brief him/her on essential points and contacts. Do so before departure. Experience shows that, once personnel departed and returned to their regular job, other priorities take over and there is less time and inclination to provide a constructive handover.

Recommended content of a Handover Note

- Description of duties during the mission (which may differ from the standard job description)
- ReadMe file with key documents, reference material
- List of recurring meetings to attend
- List of reporting duties and deadlines
- Note on projects and reports worked on and completed
- List of projects in progress, with status update and priorities, challenges, contacts of

- partners
- Recommendations
- Other observations, miscellaneous
- Contact list of external counterparts, stakeholders, with brief assessment if possible

The ReadMe file is best compiled as part of regular work by saving relevant documents and files in a dedicated online folder that can then be made accessible to a successor. Even in the digital age, physical files with originals or hard copies of key documents (e.g. signed contracts) are kept and should be included in the handover.

The same approach helps with producing the handover note. That way these tasks do not turn into an extra burden during the stressful departure period. Share the link to the ReadMe file and the handover note with your supervisor. A sample handover note template is annexed to this entry.

Last but not least, complete departure formalities and leave contact details (phone, email) for possible inquiries later on. Departure formalities include returning corporate equipment (mobile phone and SIM card, laptop, radio, etc.) and signing off on the custodian sheet, submitting UN and other ID cards, and settling all payments and obligations.

Return

While you are looking forward to returning home, the departure can be stressful and transition back to normal life challenging. It can be difficult to let go of the emergency operation, leave the team and end the commitment. The needs continue but must be addressed by someone else, and a successor taking over the job means we become aware that we are replaceable.

Mark the conclusion of your mission with an informal gathering of colleagues to reflect on your experience, your contribution to the operation (professional and personal) and to say goodbye and thank you. Inform also external counterparts of your departure and thank them for their cooperation and support.

In case of a mission to an E or D Duty Station, arrange post mission debrief with Psychosocial Wellbeing Section and schedule the mandatory CTO right after the mission to create a 'buffer zone' during which to take time for yourself and re-establish your normal routine. If not entitled to CTO, request AL to take a break.

You are looking forward to family and friends whose life continued in your absence. By staying in touch online, the gap created by the separation and distance can be bridged to some extent but perhaps not fully. Visualize your return, the expectations of your loved ones as well as your own. You will want to tell of your experience but not all of it may be suitable for sharing. Consider taking difficult things that cannot be shared with family and friends to a professional counsellor in order not to suffer a negative impact over time.

Colleagues will expect the 'old' you to return and to step back into your role fully and shoulder responsibilities as before. Ask colleagues and your supervisor for their consideration if you need time to re-adjust. If you find re-entry into your regular work and life difficult, it can be an indication to seek professional counselling and advice.

Checklist

- Collect relevant job-related information and documents in an online folder during your deployment to serve as a ready-made handover file at the end of the mission.
- Consider which information helped you (or would have helped) on arrival when compiling the package for your successor.
- Review the handover note template for guidance on which kind of information to provide.
- If it is not possible to meet in person, arrange a Teams call to brief your successor, preferably before your own departure.
- Inform internal and external counterparts of your departure and ask to support your successor.
- A farewell gathering to say thank you and goodbye contributes to the return preparation.
- Stay in contact with family and friends during your absence while bearing in mind that their life continues separately, and reuniting may take some effort.
- Make sure to attend the post mission PWS de-brief and take the mandatory CTO break or request AL after emergency mission to ease the transition back to regular life.
- Seek professional support if you find it difficult to adjust after returning home.

Annexes

[UNHCR, Handover Note template, 2024](#)

4. Main contacts

[Psychosocial Wellbeing Section](#)

[Medical Section](#)