

Coping with stress

07 September 2023

Key points

- Know what you are trying to do in every situation. This helps you to remain constructive when you face problems.
- Engage in something other than work every day. This helps you to stay mentally fit.
- Call or skype home. Write a letter if telephone lines are poor or internet is too slow for skype. This helps you to be who you are.
- Create opportunities for extended sleep (at least 6 hours). Make every effort to eat good food. Drink water rather than alcohol or sweetened soft drinks. This helps you to remain balanced.
- Do not drink excessively to unwind or relax. Practice breathing or other relaxing exercises instead.

1. Overview

Working in humanitarian emergencies is among the hardest of professions. Stressors are pervasive, and how we cope with stress often determines whether the personal outcome is positive or negative. Stress can push us to extraordinary achievements but can also have insidiously debilitating effects on what we do and how we do it. Sometimes, we experience different states simultaneously.

We tend to engage in an emergency operation as if it is a sprint. Rather than pace ourselves, we run as hard and fast as possible. However, emergencies are hardly ever short sprints. To avoid the malign effects of cumulative stress, we need to learn how to pace ourselves and find time for activities other than work. The sections below on 'good practice recommendations' and 'considerations for practical implementation' may help you to keep chronic fatigue at bay.

An emergency deployment requires the best of us. If we are incapacitated by fatigue or stress, we offer less than we can. To meet the needs of persons of concern, we have a duty to enhance our personal resilience and manage stress as well as possible.

2. Main guidance

Underlying policies, principles and/or standards

'Resilience' refers to a person's ability to adapt well to adversity, tragedy, threats, or major sources of stress. It is not a trait that individuals possess or lack; it involves behaviours, attitudes and feelings that we can learn and foster.

Experienced or not, every stressed individual can reach a point of saturation; beyond it, habitual coping mechanisms do not work. For this reason, you should not take your resilience for granted or neglect yourself during emergency deployments. If you notice too late that you are overtired, you may already have harmed yourself, damaged your team's dynamics or, most important, failed adequately to have assisted persons of concern, who need your contribution the most.

See if you recognize yourself in some of the descriptions below. You may also use a self-assessment tool (see 'documents and references').

- A. Cumulative stress impairs your capacity to process information. You become less able to manage more than two pieces of information at once, or absorb new information and integrate it with knowledge you already possess. It impairs decision-making and your ability to learn from experience, two faculties of high importance in emergency operations.
- B. Cumulative stress reduces your ability to cooperate. Normally most of us have a good balance between our desire to make an impact in the world, and our desire to be liked by and associate with people around us. When we are stressed, power dominates the impulse to affiliate. We focus on getting ahead, careless of whether we are liked or not. Relationships become manipulative, a means to an end.
- C. Cumulative stress detaches you from people around you. A stress-induced hormonal misbalance initially causes moodiness, which eventually becomes emotional numbness. Anger becomes the only directly experienced emotion.
- D. In the long run, cumulative stress may make you sick, physically and mentally.

Good practice recommendations

Know why you are where you are, in your life and in your day. Know what you expect from what you are doing. This knowledge is the foundation of resilience to stress and fatigue. People who have decided what they want to achieve, and can see the purpose of their actions and experiences, are far less vulnerable to the malignant impacts of stress. Conversely, when we deny or fail to understand our deeper motives, we tend to disengage from work and our environment, making ourselves highly vulnerable to the malignant effects of stress.

Answering the questions below may help you to recognize your motives, particularly if you write the answers down in a personal note. Take time to think about your answers in a quiet environment and have the courage to be honest with yourself.

Note that answers may be complex and are frequently not coherent or consistent. What you write may seem contradictory. Such contradictions pose less of a problem when we are familiar with them.

- Why do you work in UNHCR?
- What did you realistically expect from this particular assignment?
- What did you hope for?
- How does your situation look today, in the light of your answers to these questions?

It is also important to understand how you value yourself and what you do. This knowledge helps you to deal with others who try to assess you, and with any dissatisfaction you may feel because work is not being done properly. Once again, your answers may not be coherent; be honest and consider carefully what you say.

- What are the personal costs, and the rewards, of your work?
- How do you measure success in your work?
- What can you control in your work?
- What did you (or will you) achieve today?

Revisit these questions from time to time. When you are in trouble it may help to remind yourself of the 'bigger picture'.

Do not assume that you know the answers. Write down what you think and look at what you have said.

You may call a staff welfare officer (see 'Need help?') to talk about your answers and your frustrations. Your conversation will be confidential and may deepen your understanding.

Considerations for practical implementation

Being as clear as possible with yourself about your motives, about the rewards you obtain from your job, and the price you pay, is the foundation of resilience.

The next step in building and sustaining personal resilience is to make every reasonable effort to eat well, sleep well, and drink enough water. Good health and fitness are prerequisites for coping effectively with stress.

Do not drink too much alcohol to unwind or relax. There are better ways, some of which are proposed below.

Take leave and holidays when you can and make sure that you schedule them.

To help you stay in a healthy state of mind (and eat well, sleep well, and stay away from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs), we propose the following practices.

- Think regularly about things other than work: this injunction is common to all methods of building resilience.
- Avoid talking about work with your colleagues after work. Do not become your work.
- Keep in regular contact with home and friends (by skype or e-mail). They will remind you that there is a world outside your duty station.
- Find an understanding soul in your duty station and talk about what matters (emotions, meaning, life choices).
- Write your thoughts in a stream of consciousness every evening. It has been shown that this technique improves the quality of sleep and reduces the impact of cumulative stress.

[Instructions. Set a 15 minute alarm on your phone so that you do not have to watch the time. Have enough paper to hand. Promise yourself you will show no-one what you write. Start writing whatever comes into your mind and keep writing for 15 minutes (until the alarm rings). Do not try to write coherently, correctly, or in complete sentences. When you do not know what to write, write that thought down. Do the exercise regularly, every evening.]

- Do a mindfulness breathing exercise every evening. This is an alternative to the stream of consciousness exercise, and also improves the quality of sleep. If practised in the morning, it improves attention, emotional control and mental discipline in general.

[Instruction. Set a 15 minute alarm on your phone so that you do not have to watch the time. Sit in a chair with your back straight, your legs parallel to each other, and hands resting in your lap. Take slow deep breaths. Exhale for slightly longer than you inhale. Keep your mind focused on the flow of air and on the movement of your belly. When your thoughts attract your attention, concentrate on breathing ... Breathe 100 times if need be; let the thoughts come and go. Do this exercise regularly every morning. Do not be discouraged if you cannot make two consecutive breaths without chasing your thoughts. Most people find this at the start. This is an exercise in willed focus of mind, very helpful in chaotic environments like those that exist in an emergency.]

- Take physical exercise or do yoga. These activities rebalance your hormones and drain toxic metabolic agents.

[Instructions. Many sites provide advice. Try: <http://emergencyyoga.wordpress.com/>.]

- If you have hobbies, practise them: do them every day if the environment permits.
- Read literature rather than watch TV. Television rarely engages your mind as much as

literature.

Resources and partnerships

In UNHCR, eight staff counsellors (in Islamabad, Amman, Nairobi, Juba, Kinshasa, Geneva, and Dakar) are available to give personal advice and confidential counselling. (See 'Need help?')

The UN has more than 100 staff and stress counsellors. Check if there is one in your duty station.

You may also make use of external professionals.

3. Links

[A site dedicated to the mental health of humanitarian workers This covers a broad range of health subjects, including mental health, in a use... A site dedicated to raising self-awareness A site developed by colleagues which demonstrates yoga and other stress managem...](#)

4. Main contacts

UNHCR staff welfare officers:

Geneva HQ

Dubravka SUZIC
Chief, Psychosocial Wellbeing Section
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7947
Mobile: +41 79 202 2417
PAMA: 90 4122 7947
SKYPE: dudasuzic
Email: suzic@unhcr.org

Verane BRAISSAND
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 8235
Mobile: +41 79 217 3191
PAMA: 90 4122 8235
SKYPE: verane.braissand
Email: braissan@unhcr.org

Sandrine ZUGER
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7764
SKYPE: sandrinez7

Email: zuger@unhcr.org

Seynabou BADIANE
Staff Counselor
Office Telephone: + 41 22 739 7605
SKYPE: seynabou009
Email: badiane@unhcr.org

Regional staff welfare officers

Lilian EWAGATA
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Regional Support Hub
Nairobi, Kenya
Office Telephone: +254 20 4222 000 ext. 2610
Mobile: +254 735 337 609
PAMA: 90 254 02 2610
SKYPE: Lilian Ewagata
Email: ewagata@unhcr.org

Najlaa JARBOU
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile +963 930 230 708
Office Telephone: + 963 21 2240664 ext. 2116
Email: jarbou@unhcr.org

Wafika Reem TAFRAN
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile + 963 993319722
Office Telephone: + 963 11 21812116
PAMA: 9096301 2116
SKYPE: Wafika Tafran
Email: tafran@unhcr.org

Achille KODO
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Dakar, Senegal
Office Telephone: + 221 33 867 6207 Ext 2155
Mobile: + 221 786 370823
PAMA: 90 221 01 2180
SKYPE: achille.kodo
Email: kodo@unhcr.org

Marieme DIOUF NDIAYE
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Amman, Jordan
Mobile + 962 79 570 43 64
Office Telephone: +962 6 5100 460 2117
PAMA: 90 96202 2117
Email: ndiyem@unhcr.org

Fadi HAMDI
Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Beirut - Lebanon
Office Telephone: 41 22 331 5452
SKYPE: fadihamdi55
Email: hamdi@unhcr.org

In case of conflict with colleagues or partners

11 September 2023

Key points

- In situations of conflict, the key value is respect. Disrespectful behaviour should not be tolerated in UNHCR offices, regardless of how deep a conflict is.
- Never argue. Arguing does not convince the other party. Try to present your point of view concisely. If you are not heard or understood, manage the situation rather than argue. Ask your adversary to say why he or she believes you think (or feel) the way you do.
- Do not allow yourself to become emotional. Use your reason to understand what is going on between you and your adversary.
- Try to find value in the other's point of view. When you find it, let your adversary know. This may also help you to express your views in a form that your adversary can appreciate and understand.

1. Overview

Conflict in a workplace normally takes the form of an intense disagreement over perspectives and ideas. Often, it grows out of seemingly incompatible concerns. The intensity springs from the emotional engagement of the individuals in disagreement. Emotions are a natural part of our

response to disagreement. They are present in office communications whenever committed people work together. In UNHCR emergency response teams, where commitment and long hours and insufficient resources often collide, the atmosphere easily becomes charged.

On average, UNHCR officers spend 20% of their time managing their own conflicts or conflict in their teams. At times, some teams can spend as much as 75% of their time and energy on conflict.

This Entry briefly examines the day-to-day conflict that occurs in most offices and teams. The section on 'Good practice recommendations' describes some of the ways in which conflict can be understood, foreseen, and avoided. The section 'Considerations for practical implementations' describes how to manage conflict effectively, when it occurs.

2. Main guidance

Underlying policies, principles and/or standards

It is easier to work with conflict if we accept that it is a natural element in our personal emotional landscape and our interpersonal environment in the office. If we expect or want conflicts to disappear and never resurface, we are likely to be frustrated and depleted of energy – which, in turn, will cause us to behave more aggressively, tipping us into a downward spiral.

Conflict may be the single most incapacitating feature of team work. It can lower moral, severely impair decision-making, and decrease team output in almost every respect. Simultaneously, conflict sometimes drives outstanding team achievements. It can boost creativity, keep energy high, raise the quality of decision-making, and align a team with strategic objectives. In most cases, it is how we manage conflict that determines the personal and team outcome.

The UNHCR [Code of Conduct](#) defines minimum standards of behaviour in UNHCR offices: it calls for constructive and respectful working relations, and requires all of us to contribute to building a harmonious workplace based on team spirit, mutual respect and understanding. When disputes lead to communications that are disrespectful, promote antagonism and deepen friction, it is not only a matter for the quarrelling parties; it is of concern to the organisation.

Good practice recommendations

Tact is extraordinarily important in diverse teams, like those in UNHCR. Tolerance of intense disagreement differs considerably among UNHCR staff. Direct communication for one may be offensive to another. Emotional debate may be reasonable for you and overwhelming for your colleague. The answer is to take care of individuals who disagree with your perspective by communicating in a manner that is tolerable for them. Adjust your tone, not what you want to impart.

Everyone needs to feel valued, heard, and understood: these feelings are far more important to

us than our opinions. We can surrender an opinion when we feel valued, and people who feel respected and appreciated by their colleagues are less likely to be hostile and more likely to cooperate.

Apply the following three procedures to prevent disagreement from escalating.

- Listen to understand the other's position.
- Look for value in the other's position:
 - Value how they think, if not their conclusions.
 - Consider their core concerns, with some of which you will probably agree.
 - Remember that their feelings, like yours, often indicate genuine commitment.
 - Credit the effort they have made: effort should always be acknowledged.
- Communicate that you recognize there are values in the other's perspective.

You can appreciate and find value in others' positions without surrendering your own. You can disagree but find some merits in their perspective. Communication can remain open and constructive, and, most important, you can focus on the issue, not egos.

Engagement must be real. Pretense of respect and appreciation does not normally work. You must search for the real value in another point of view. Developing this skill can transform the way you relate to people in your team.

Considerations for practical implementation

Two typical responses to conflict are: 'run away' or 'battle it out'. In many instances these strategies work well, avoidance in particular. We say that it is wise to pick the battles you fight and good to win the battles you pick. However, you never know if a battle will transform into a war, and wars damage everyone. For this reason, consider a different approach. Above all:

- Do not take an office conflict personally. This common sense advice is easier to acknowledge than to apply. Remind yourself that you are primarily in a professional relationship with your colleague and finding out the solution for professional issues should be the priority. When the conflict feels very personal, try not to react from the emotional perspective. Obtain some feedback from a trusted and neutral friend or talk to a Staff Welfare Officer prior to deciding to act.
- Listen and listen more. When you catch yourself arguing or defending your position, pause and switch to listening again!

See if some of advice below could help. It will be most useful if you take your context into account, for example: are you in a heated argument in a public place, or in your room, tired after a difficult day.

- When you find yourself in an argument, pause for a moment. Step out of the scene in your mind and observe what is happening from 'above'. Try to see how the argument might benefit you and might benefit 'them'. Even in the middle of a heated discussion, you will have time to think because people meander and repeat themselves when they are emotional.
- In your mind, imagine you are a mediator between yourself and your adversary. How could you reconcile your position and that of your adversary?
- Think about what matters essentially to you. Find your underlying concerns and locate your emotions.
- Think about your adversary: try to identify their emotions, concerns, and look for value in their perspective.
- When you have found elements in their perspective that you appreciate, tell your adversary. If you have not yet found any elements you appreciate, ask more questions and listen positively. Do so even if your adversary does not reciprocate.
- If you cannot listen, and you are repeatedly interrupted when trying to express yourself, say that you need time to express yourself. Request 3 minutes of uninterrupted time. That is normally enough to say what you really need to say: to outline your perspective, highlight your concerns, and express your feelings.
- If your adversary does not appear to have understood, do not continue to assert your point of view. Instead, ask your adversary to explain why he or she believes you feel and think the way as you do.

Resources and partnerships

The most important resource is your mind, and its ability to manage emotions and take care of situations.

The most important partner is your 'adversary'. If both sides genuinely wish to resolve a dispute, most differences can be bridged.

Check if your office includes people who are trained to be helpful in situations of workplace conflict (respectful workplace advisers, peer support persons).

Annexes

[Communication Aptitude Self Assessment](#)

[Forbes Magazine, article on leadership and conflict](#)

3. Links

[A site dedicated to human resources management in non-profit organisations](#) [A site for mediators and those interested in mediation at the workplace](#)

4. Main contacts

Contact the Ombudsman's office, Tahiana Andriamasomanana, Ombudsman. Tel: +41 (22) 739 8919. E-mail: andriama@unhcr.org.

Contact Staff Welfare Section , who are available for telephone calls at any time.

Geneva - HQs

Dubravka SUZIC
Chief, Psychosocial Wellbeing Section
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7947
Mobile: +41 79 202 2417
PAMA: 90 4122 7947
SKYPE: dudasuzic
Email: suzic@unhcr.org

Verane BRAISSAND
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 8235
Mobile: +41 79 217 3191
PAMA: 90 4122 8235
SKYPE: verane.braissand
Email: braissan@unhcr.org

Sandrine ZUGER
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7764
SKYPE: sandrinez7
Email: zuger@unhcr.org

Seynabou BADIANE
Staff Counselor
Office Telephone: + 41 22 739 7605
SKYPE: seynabou009
Email: badiane@unhcr.org

Regional staff welfare officers

Lilian EWAGATA
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Regional Support Hub
Nairobi, Kenya
Office Telephone: +254 20 4222 000 ext. 2610
Mobile: +254 735 337 609
PAMA: 90 254 02 2610
SKYPE: Lilian Ewagata
Email: ewagata@unhcr.org

Najlaa JARBOU
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile +963 930 230 708
Office Telephone: + 963 21 2240664 ext. 2116
Email: jarbou@unhcr.org

Wafika Reem TAFRAN
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile + 963 993319722
Office Telephone: + 963 11 21812116
PAMA: 9096301 2116
SKYPE: Wafika Tafran
Email: tafran@unhcr.org

Achille KODO
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Dakar, Senegal
Office Telephone: + 221 33 867 6207 Ext 2155
Mobile: + 221 786 370823
PAMA: 90 221 01 2180
SKYPE: achille.kodo
Email: kodo@unhcr.org

Marieme DIOUF NDIAYE
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Amman, Jordan
Mobile + 962 79 570 43 64
Office Telephone: +962 6 5100 460 2117
PAMA: 90 96202 2117
Email: ndiayem@unhcr.org
[url=file:///H:/ndiayem@unhcr.org]ndiayem@unhcr.org
[/url]
Fadi HAMDI

Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Beirut - Lebanon
Office Telephone: 41 22 331 5452
SKYPE: fadihamdi55
Email: hamdi@unhcr.org

Getting ready for your emergency deployment

23 March 2023

Key points

- Honestly assess your physical and psychological readiness for deployment.
- Contact UNHCR's staff welfare section for psychological preparation unless you have attended a WEM recently
- Discuss the deployment with your partner and friends. If you have children help them to understand what you will be doing.
- Before you leave, ask a few close friends to be regularly in touch with you.
- Prepare a realistic self-care plan.
- Ensure that your private financial and administrative affairs are in order and taken care of.
- Ensure that you have a reliable back-up at work in case of your absence
- Take care of your health - do not procrastinate the medical and dental appointments
- Ensure your travel documents are in order.
- Learn about the operation
- Keep a positive attitude and open mind towards your role in the operation.

1. Overview

Preparing for your emergency deployment usually requires you to consider three areas. This Entry discusses:

- Psychological preparedness - for you, your family, and friends.

- Practical readiness, including your personal and professional affairs, and what to pack.
- Situational preparedness. You should study and understand, as far as possible, the operational context in which you will be working.

You may be called to deploy to an emergency at short notice. (Members of UNHCR's internal emergency roster have committed to deploy within 72 hours.) You may have little time to make yourself ready and deployment will dramatically interrupt and change what you do currently.

An emergency assignment also challenges your wellbeing: the working hours, especially to start with, will be long; working conditions will not be ideal; living conditions may be spartan; security may be a concern; your sleep is likely to suffer. You can be effective in such conditions, but you are likely to manage the stress of your deployment much better if you are well prepared.

Emergency missions can also create anxiety in those around you. Deployments can easily disrupt our relationships with partners, spouses, children and friends. All may have concerns, and it is important to find ways to include them as you prepare to deploy.

2. Main guidance

Underlying policies, principles and/or standards

Psychological preparedness

Since 2012, psychological preparation is offered as a matter of course to all staff assigned to D and E duty stations. It covers potentially broad range of subjects.

- Personal and family issues.
- Practical and logistical arrangements at home or at base.
- Practical preparations for deployment.
- Psychological preparation.

When you prepare psychologically, you attune your inner resources to the coming situation. A person who is psychologically prepared expects certain challenges, foresees their impact, understands how he or she will react, is able to identify his or her inner resources, and knows where and how to seek support when needed.

People differ in the degree of preparation they need. Some prepare very thoroughly. Their preparation is planned and detailed. Others are happier to go with a flow. Find what level of preparation suits your personal needs.

Attitude is an important factor, and will influence your ability to succeed in the demanding and chaotic environment of an emergency. What qualities are required of members of an emergency team?

- To be professional.
- To be a team player.
- To be flexible and understanding.

- To have a sense of humour!

Practical readiness

The underlying principle is that you should not delay your deployment, because the emergency response operation will need you. A few days in a fast moving operation can make a big difference.

Members of UNHCR's internal roster are typically recommended to avoid important commitments (weddings, pregnancy, paternity leave) during the period of their standby commitment (9 months). Your current professional environment should be willing to approve your departure at short notice. Plan in advance what you will pack, though this of course depends on the context.

Situational Preparedness

While you can and should actively research the country and operational context to which you will deploy, it is well understood that you cannot prepare deeply if you are deployed within a few hours or days.

Good practice recommendations

Psychological preparedness

Create a mental picture. Think about the upcoming deployment and compare it to previous deployments. Develop this into a structured preparation by reflecting on what was helpful to you in similar contexts and what you would have done differently. Ask what aspects of the new deployment are likely to be the most challenging for you, professionally and personally. This exercise will help you to identify the challenges you are likely to face and the resources you will draw on to cope and deal with them.

Assess your current psychosocial wellbeing. It may be difficult to assess your own state of mind. Nevertheless, try to give yourself some honest feedback on how you have functioned in recent months. Have you slept for enough time and well? What has been your level of energy? What has been your prevailing mood? Have you consumed more alcohol than usual, or other substances? What level of social support have you received from others? Have you been able to support people close to you? Are you running away from anything? The answers to these questions may help you identify areas to which you should give attention. A conversation with a Staff Welfare Officer (SWO) may help you to identify such issues faster and to develop a plan for addressing them. If the exercise makes you unsure about your deployment, contact a SWO for a confidential conversation.

Familiarize yourself with typical stress and trauma reactions. When we experience psychological disturbances, if we do not understand what are they linked to, we can feel as if our body or mind has let us down. If you are familiar with the neurobiological symptoms of stress and trauma, you will be able to recognise stress reactions faster and will be more likely to address them constructively. (See Entry [Coping with Stress](#) and [Dealing with critical incidents and](#)

[trauma](#))

Develop your personal indicators of fatigue. Being aware of our stress reactions is a first step towards building resilience. When we are in the middle of a difficult situation, it is hard to step back and decide what we need to do to change our situation. Put down how you feel, think and behave when you are close to the edge or extremely tired. Discuss your list with friends who know you well; ask them to comment on it and add their observations of you.

The 'buddy system'. It has been shown that the support of close friends helps to sustain people who are working in stressful conditions. Ask a few trusted friends or family members to check on you regularly while you are deployed. If possible, discuss how they will 'watch over you' and what warning signs they will look for. Make use of your personal indicators of fatigue.

Prepare a self care plan. (See Entry [Coping with Stress](#).) Think what normally relaxes you (music, books, sport, etc.). Keep such items ready: prepare your kindle and music, food, photographs, exercise equipment (skipping rope, pilates' ball, football). Design a realistic self-care plan that you know you can implement.

Take care of your relationships. Emergency deployment will disrupt your relationships. That does not mean they will dissolve, but you need to pay attention to how they are affected. Observation suggests that relationships survive best when everyone is involved in preparing for deployment. This may seem counter-intuitive: you may be tempted to conceal dangerous or ugly aspects of the operation from those you love. In fact, by giving them a role, you help those close to you to prepare themselves; and they often feel fulfilled by supporting you. The connection between you can become stronger as you foster inter-reliance. If those close to you become very anxious, contact a SWO for advice and support.

Help your children to understand. Today it is harder and harder to keep information away from children. Try to understand how they imagine your world. Help them to understand where you will be going, what you will be doing, and how you will keep in contact. Be aware that your children may well have heard or read news about the place to which you will deploy.

Practical Readiness

Sort out your affairs. It is important to put your financial, legal and daily affairs in order before you leave. Once you are on mission it is unlikely that you will be able to settle bills, pay the rent, or take care of other aspects of your life at home. Plan for this in advance and make sure that affairs at home are taken care of or can wait.

Health. Do your medical check-up and, if necessary, obtain medical clearance.

Passport. Make sure your passport (and UNLP if applicable) are at hand, and will remain valid for at least 18 months (or for at least six months after the end of your planned mission).

Your current work. If you need to take absence from your current job, make sure that back-up arrangements are in place, and that you have agreed with your supervisor how outstanding

projects and activities will be managed while you are away.

Situational Preparedness

As far as possible, obtain and read the documents below, for the country to which you will deploy. If you are deployed through UNHCR, the DESS emergency service (or possibly the relevant country desk) may be able to obtain them for you.

- Your terms of reference for the mission.
- An administrative brief on the operation. (This is often provided on arrival in the country.)
- The most recent situation reports.
- Recent information on the country operation, if one already exists. Look at UNHCR Global Appeals or the Global Report chapter on UNHCR's website.
- For refugee situations, look at the relevant UNHCR data portal; for IDP situations, look at the OCHA situation page.
- Operation planning documents: the contingency plan, the Refugee Response Plan (RRP, refugees), the Preliminary Response Plan (PRP, IDPs), or Strategic Response Plan (SRP).
- Media reports and analysis of the situation.

Considerations for practical implementation

Do not leave preparation for the last minute. Some things can be done much earlier. In particular, follow the advice provided in the sub-section 'Psychological preparedness' above.

Packing tips

- Make a checklist at once, before any decision on your deployment.
- Adjust it to take account of conditions in the place to which you are deployed.
- Start packing early; do not wait until the last minute.
- Have small and large bags.
- Pack essential food and medical items that are not standard and may be unavailable.
- Pack personal items that will give you comfort.
- Shop for camping equipment, clothes, etc.
- Prioritise light, essential items. Be ready to adapt packing to actual conditions (cold, hot, humid etc.).
- Find out what you are expected to bring, and what will be available when you arrive (laptop, specialised equipment, etc.). UNHCR usually provides ICT equipment for those it deploys. (See Entries ICT emergency preparedness.)
- Take an inventory with you in case your bag gets lost.

SOME PACKING IDEAS FOR DEEP FIELD LOCATIONS...

Mosquito net dome, treated with repellent, freestanding.

Sleeping bag, full zip, treated with repellent.

Fleece blanket and mattress (including repair kit).

Your favourite pillow, ear plugs, sleeping mask.

Tarpaulin, solar shower, fire blanket.

Water purification bottle with integrated filter.

Micropur tablets.

Kitchen utensils(Camp-A-Box),thermos.

Multi tool, LED lamp, whistle.

LED lamp.

Compass, fire steel lighter, sewing kit, waterproof matchbox.

Set of cleaning sponges.

TSA approved padlock with code.

Refreshing tissues, germicide.

Mosquito coils with holder.

Dynamo torch, working gloves.

Batteries.

Greg's Tips for Emergency Missions

I figured out a long time ago that nothing goes well for me without a decent night's sleep. I always sort out sleeping arrangements from the beginning, and don't go anywhere without my trusty pillow. I don't need fancy - just a clean space where I can be certain of rest without, for example, being bitten to pieces by mosquitoes. In the tropics, don't move without a net or mosquito dome.

- Having good coffee to start the day is not something to mess with. I always travel with a small cafetière, a stash of good quality ground coffee, and a small cup.
- I also don't go anywhere without my ipod, earphones, and a small speaker. Having my own music is non-negotiable and grounds me.
- Exercise is critical to feeling good. I travel with my running shoes and exercise bands, which allows for a good workout anywhere on earth.
- I find that coordination and teamwork is often smoothed by a stock of decent beverages. I always leave room in my bag, no matter how small, for a good bottle or two of something that goes down well at the end of a long day. To be enjoyed with discipline, of course!

Greg Garras is a Senior Officer at UNHCR. He has worked in many humanitarian emergencies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Timor Leste.

Resources and partnerships

UNHCR has posted staff counsellors in Islamabad, Amman, Nairobi, Juba, Kinshasa, Geneva, Beirut and Dakar, who are available for psychological preparation. (See 'Need help?' below).

If you prefer to discuss your preparation with an external mental health professional, a SWS can refer you to one, free of charge for UNHCR staff. If you select your own psychological adviser, you will be expected to pay his or her fee, which will not be reimbursable.

Annexes

[Psychological preparation for hardship assignments and missions, June 2012](#)

[People in Aid, Code of good practice in management and support of aid personnel, 2003](#)

[Antares Foundation, Managing Stress of Humanitarian Workers - Best practice guide, 2005](#)

[Self-assessment tool](#)

[UNSSC, Mission readiness. Preparing for Field Work, 2004](#)

[UNHCR, Basic Stress Management for Difficult Assignments. Notes for Staff Assigned to Emergencies, 2009](#)

3. Links

[Headington Institute](#) [Anatares Foundation](#) [Centre for Humanitarian Psychology](#) [International Crisis Group](#) [Humanitarian Response](#) [UNHCR website](#) [UNHCR data website](#)

4. Main contacts

The Emergency Service, UNHCR DESS. At: HQECMDPL@unhcr.org

UNHCR staff welfare officers:

Geneva HQ

Dubravka SUZIC
Chief, Psychosocial Wellbeing Section
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7947
Mobile: +41 79 202 2417
PAMA: 90 4122 7947
SKYPE: dudasuzic
Email: suzic@unhcr.org

Verane BRAISSAND
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 8235
Mobile: +41 79 217 3191
PAMA: 90 4122 8235
SKYPE: verane.braissand
Email: braissan@unhcr.org

Sandrine ZUGER
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7764
SKYPE: sandrinez7
Email: zuger@unhcr.org

Seynabou BADIANE
Staff Counselor
Office Telephone: + 41 22 739 7605

SKYPE: seynabou009
Email: badiane@unhcr.org

Regional staff welfare officers

Lilian EWAGATA
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Regional Support Hub
Nairobi, Kenya
Office Telephone: +254 20 4222 000 ext. 2610
Mobile: +254 735 337 609
PAMA: 90 254 02 2610
SKYPE: Lilian Ewagata
Email: ewagata@unhcr.org

Najlaa JARBOU
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile +963 930 230 708
Office Telephone: + 963 21 2240664 ext. 2116
Email: jarbou@unhcr.org

Wafika Reem TAFRAN
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile + 963 993319722
Office Telephone: + 963 11 21812116
PAMA: 9096301 2116
SKYPE: Wafika Tafran
Email: tafran@unhcr.org

Achille KODO
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Dakar, Senegal
Office Telephone: + 221 33 867 6207 Ext 2155
Mobile: + 221 786 370823
PAMA: 90 221 01 2180
SKYPE: achille.kodo
Email: kodo@unhcr.org

Marieme DIOUF NDIAYE
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Amman, Jordan
Mobile + 962 79 570 43 64
Office Telephone: +962 6 5100 460 2117

PAMA: 90 96202 2117
Email: ndiyem@unhcr.org

Fadi HAMDI
Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Beirut - Lebanon
Office Telephone: 41 22 331 5452
SKYPE: fadihamdi55
Email: hamdi@unhcr.org

Requesting emergency deployments (personnel)

08 March 2023

Key points

- The four main mechanisms for emergency deployments include: the permanent standby teams of UNHCR DESS-Emergency Services (ES); the senior corporate emergency roster (SCER); the emergency response team (ERT) roster; and personnel rosters managed by emergency standby partners.
- To request an emergency deployment, contact ES and the regional bureau. In L2 and L3 emergencies, one or more ES standby teams are automatically deployed within 72 hours.
- Emergency deployment requests from the internal standby rosters and from standby partners must be endorsed by the Representative, and must include request forms and TORs. DESS proposes candidates to the Representative and activates deployment unless substantiated objections are received within 24 hours.
- Staff on the ERT or SCER rosters are mobilized within 72 hours. The mobilization time for staff on the rosters of standby partners is between 72 hours and 2 weeks.
- The DSA and travel costs of internal emergency staff are covered by the requesting operation.
- When contemplating requesting the an emergency deployment, immediately consider also the required support, such as office space and equipment, accommodation, etc. Plan in a timely manner for possible extension of deployees or mid/longer term staffing needs.

1. Overview

UNHCR has put arrangements in place to deploy emergency staff when sudden surges in demand occur during emergency situations. These mechanisms enable emergency operations to manage when their staff resources are insufficient. Four main rosters are available:

- A. The permanent standby teams of the Emergency Services of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS).
- B. The senior corporate emergency roster (SCER).
- C. Emergency response team (ERT) roster.
- D. Functional Rosters (HR, Supply, Registration, Admin/Finance), that are managed jointly by the Divisions and DESS.
- E. Personnel rosters managed by [emergency standby partners](#).

This Entry describes the circumstances in which these mechanisms may be activated, the services they offer, and how emergency operations can request deployees.

2. Main guidance

When and for what purpose?

When a UNHCR office has insufficient human resources to respond to an emergency DESS/ES can deploy additional personnel at short notice to strengthen UNHCR emergency operations and respond to the needs of refugees, IDPs or other persons of concern.

Associated risks

- **Delays in deployment.** Deployees may arrive late for a number of reasons: visa delays, security concerns, other difficulties of access, slow decisions on terms of reference (TORs), budget codes or other administrative matters.
- **Depleted rosters.** If emergencies occur consecutively or simultaneously, standby resources may be exhausted or candidates with the right profile may not be available.
- **Tensions in teams.** When deployees join teams at short notice, or new teams are formed, they may take time to settle-in. To enable new teams to perform well, both the requesting operation and deployees need to show openness and flexibility. Managers play a key role in integration; preparation of clear and realistic terms of reference for all deployees, before they start, can also prevent many problems from occurring.
- **Challenging working conditions.** New emergencies pose challenges that naturally affect the performance and well-being of emergency teams: the pressure to act; chaos and uncertainty; insufficient resources (laptops, communication equipment, vehicles, etc.); sub-standard or improvised accommodation and offices. Many of these difficulties can be addressed by good planning and management and administration, but all involved need to be flexible and show good will.

Steps to be taken

1. Request emergency deployees

To initiate an emergency deployment, an operation submits a request to the Partnership and Deployments Unit, Emergency Services (ES). Requests must be accompanied by the documentation required (see below), and must be endorsed by the Representative and copied to the bureau.

2. Review by Emergency Services

ES will review the request and decide whether to deploy staff from UNHCR's internal emergency standby rosters or request standby partners to nominate a candidate from their rosters.

3. Technical assessment

Technical experts who form part of the ERT roster are assessed before being placed on the roster with the respective technical units. ES also closely coordinates with other Divisions on the deployment of 'technical experts' by Standby Partners.

4. Nomination of candidate

Having reviewed the TORs, ES identifies the best equipped candidate and consults the bureau and Representative on its choice.

5. Mobilization and travel arrangements

If the deployment is from the internal emergency standby rosters, (ERT or SCER), ES mobilizes the deployee and informs his or her supervisor. The requesting office provides the budget code for payment of travel and daily subsistence allowances (DSA). ES provides the releasing office with a travel authorisation, to prepare the PT8, and to arrange travel and payment of DSA.

If the deployment is external (from a standby partner), ES liaises between the requesting operation and the standby partner. It ensures that the operation and the partner receive all the relevant documentation. The partner ensures that the deployee is fully informed.

6. Travel to the mission

In all cases, ES ensures that the requesting operation is kept informed of a deployee's arrival. The operation is responsible for airport pick-up and accommodation.

7. Mission extension

In all cases, the requesting operation contacts the ES if it wishes to extend a deployee's mission. ES liaises with the parties concerned to secure approval of an extension and make any necessary release arrangements.

8. Performance evaluation

Country offices are expected to ensure that an evaluation of the performance of the deployee is recorded formally, either in a separate mission E-pad or, with the agreement of the staff member's regular supervisor, through inclusion in the annual E-pad. For deployees from Standby Partners, a standard evaluation form must be completed.

9. End of mission report

The deployee must submit an end of mission report to the country office, with a copy to DESS/ES.

The four main deployment options are summarized below.

A. Permanent standby teams of UNHCR DESS - Emergency Services

When any level of emergency is declared, the **Policy on Emergency Response Activation, Leadership and Accountabilities** is activated. ES is mobilized to provide technical advice and support and (in the case of an L2 or L3 emergency) automatically deploys one or more ES standby teams, led by a Principal or Senior Emergency Coordinator. ES Standby Teams will be deployed under standard ToRs, adapted as necessary to the operational environment. Deployment of an ES standby team is not automatic in L1 emergencies and depends on the additional capacity required.

Mobilization. Within 72 hours.

Period. Up to 2 months.

Extension. Depending on the requirements, one month (up to 3 months overall)

Costs. The receiving operation covers the costs of DSA and travel.

Activation. Director DESS in consultation with regional bureau.

B. Senior corporate emergency roster (SCER)

The SCER is a pool of approximately 20 UNHCR staff at the P5 level and above, who are on standby for deployment to senior roles within L2 and L3 emergencies or to be deployed as snr. cluster coordinators within the framework of the inter-agency rapid response mechanism (IARRM) for IASC system-wide scale-up emergencies.

Mobilization. Within 72 hours.

Period. Two months.

Extension. Exceptionally, missions may be extended to a third month

Costs. The receiving operation covers the costs of DSA and travel.

Activation. Deployment is triggered by Director DESS, regional bureau and/or AHC-O.

C. Roster of UNHCR's internal Emergency Response Team (ERT)

The emergency response team (ERT) is a pool of UNHCR personnel who are on standby for emergency deployment. Roster members are drawn from duty stations in the field and sections at Headquarters. The ERT roster includes staff from GS6 to P4 level and covers almost all profiles, except certain technical specialists.

Mobilization. Within 72 hours.

Period. 3 months.

Costs. The receiving operation covers the costs of DSA and travel. The receiving operation also covers the deployee's salary for the third month.

Activation. Following a request by the emergency operation, in consultation with the regional bureau and after clearance by ES. Bureau, Divisions, ES may also propose deployment of specific profiles.

D. Functional rosters (in HR, Supply, Registration, and Admin/Finance)

The functional rosters is a pool of UNHCR personnel, who have either undergone training or obtained a certification in a specific function, and who are on standby for emergency deployment. Roster members are drawn from duty stations in the field and sections at Headquarters. These rosters which are managed jointly by ES and Divisions, include staff from GS6 to P4 level, and cover the HR, Supply, Registration, and Admin/Finance profiles.

Mobilization. Varies from 72h to 2 weeks.

Period. Varies from 2 months maximum, to 2 months with a possible extension of 1 month.

Costs. The receiving operation covers the costs of DSA and travel. The receiving operation also covers the deployee's salary for the third month if applicable.

Activation. Following a request by the emergency operation, in consultation with the regional bureau and after clearance by ES and Bureau, ES consults with Division and may propose deployment of specific profiles on these functional rosters

E. Personnel rosters managed by [emergency standby partners](#)

To strengthen its response capacity, UNHCR can call on external expertise to supplement its internal resources. Through its agreements with [emergency standby partners](#), DESS has developed an extensive external deployment capacity. For more information, see Entry on '[Emergency Standby Partners](#)' and UNHCR's **Guide to [UNHCR's Emergency Standby Partners](#)**.

Mobilization. From 72 hours to 2 weeks.

Period. Usually a minimum of three months with the possibility of extension.

Extension. Most partners will request UNHCR to share the cost or fully fund longer deployments under a "reimbursable loan agreement" (RLA).

Costs. In principle, standby partners cover costs for 3 to 6 months (international travel, salary, accommodation, insurance including [medical evacuation](#)). UNHCR covers regional and internal travel, and transport costs to designated rest and recreation locations. No DSA or lump sums should be paid unless otherwise agreed.

Activation. Following a request by the emergency operation, in consultation with the regional bureau, clearance by ES (in coordination with Divisions as called for), and acceptance by the concerned standby partner.

Requests by a country office for any of the above deployments must be accompanied by the following documentation:

- Terms of Reference. Standard or generic terms of reference (TOR) may be used for certain functions but these should be adapted for the specific operational context and the expectations adjusted to the time / period of deployment.
- The Operation fact sheet.
- An official request form (internal or external). This can be provided in email format if preferred, and should contain the following information:
 - Mission location.
 - Security level/situation.
 - Visa requirements.

- Mission length.
- Language requirements.
- Description of working conditions (availability of laptops and communication equipment, vehicles, internet access, etc.).
- Description of living conditions (accommodation, electricity, food, water, etc.).
- The budget code for travel and DSA: UNHCR internal Staff (ABOD), or International United Nations Volunteer (Project).

Annexes

[The Guide to UNHCR's Emergency Standby Partners](#)

[- Request Form - Support from Standby Partners 2018](#)

[Performance Evaluation Form for Standby Staff 2018](#)

[SOPs Emergency rosters and Deployments](#)

[SOPs ERT](#)

3. Links

[Agreements with Emergency Standby Partners](#)

4. Main contacts

UNHCR Emergency Services (ES, DESS), Emergency Partnership and Deployments Unit at: HQECMDPL@unhcr.org.

- Ms. Isabelle Emmanuelli, Emergency Deployment Associate. At: emmanuel@unhcr.org.

Requesting Service Packages from Standby Partners

22 September 2023

Key points

- Emergency standby partners are able to deploy Service Packages (set of equipment, usually supported by deployees to manage or install it).
- The most frequently used Service Package is the 'base camp', a fully equipped deep field staff accommodation and office solution, as interim solution until more sustainable solutions are identified.
- The availability of a service package will depend on the standby partner's funding as well as the availability of the required equipment and staffing.
- Should you identify a need for a Service Package, contact the Emergency Preparedness, Deployments and Partnerships Section (EPDPS) in the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) @ hqdeploy@unhcr.org, keeping the Senior Occupational Safety Officer in copy.

1. Overview

In order to improve the efficiency and predictability of emergency response, UNHCR concluded a number of standby partnership agreements with Government agencies, NGOs, and private sector organizations whose specific expertise and capacity complement UNHCR's internal emergency and surge capacity. Emergency standby partners are organizations or entities that maintain a capacity of personnel or equipment on standby, which can be rapidly deployed upon request, to enhance UNHCR's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises. UNHCR's emergency standby partners offer two kinds of services: deployment of personnel and service packages.

A service package is a pre-defined set of operational support equipment that, upon request and mutual agreement between UNHCR and a standby partner. They often include the deployment of a dedicated support team that helps to set up the Service Package and train UNHCR staff on its use. Examples of Service Packages include light base camps, base camps, prefabricated facilities, accommodation and office space, as well as information and communications technology (ICT) modules.

The following entry covers Service Packages only. For more details on the deployment of standby personnel, please refer to the dedicated entry on standby partners available [here](#).

2. Relevance for emergency operations

Service Packages can be requested from UNHCR's emergency standby partners when UNHCR faces one of more of the following situations:

- UNHCR lacks the capacity to provide a particular technical service;
- The demand for a service exceeds the capacity of UNHCR's partners in the field;

- UNHCR is unable to meet the demand for a service at short notice.

The availability of a service package will depend on the standby partner's funding (taking into account the partner's geographic or thematic priorities), as well as the availability of the required equipment and staffing. Additionally, while delivery timelines are outlined below, such Service Packages can often take longer to be delivered, depending on factors linked to operational contexts (availability of land, customs clearance process, building security fencing, etc.) or the partner's capacity (availability of specific items).

3. Main guidance

A Service Package is a pre-defined set of operational support equipment that, upon request and mutual agreement between UNHCR emergency operation and a Standby Partner, is deployed to a country. Service Packages often include the deployment of a dedicated support team that helps to install the equipment and train UNHCR workforce on its use.

Service Packages usually consist of:

- Light Base Camps: tented facilities to provide short-term and rudimentary working and living conditions in emergency operations (Lifespan: 2-8 weeks);
- Base Camps: tented facilities of high quality that provide comprehensive offices and accommodation, including all necessary equipment and services; it can also serve as a transit centre (Life span: 3-12 months);
- Prefabricated Facilities: to provide offices, accommodation, sanitary facilities, a kitchen, tools and equipment, water purification and distribution, power supply and distribution, etc. (Life span: 2-5 years).

Additionally, Service Packages can consist of:

- Accommodation and office space as part of longer-term construction projects;
- ICT modules, including systems to enhance connectivity for forcibly displaced and stateless people;
- Civil or mechanical engineering modules;
- Logistics support, including transport capacity, light vehicles, armoured vehicles, etc.

The legal framework for UNHCR's collaboration with Standby Partners is the Emergency Standby Partnership Agreement that UNHCR has signed with each Standby Partner, covering the deployment of standby personnel and Service Packages. Support staff included in a Service Package deployment follows the same terms and conditions applying to [Standby Partner deployees](#) (as outlined in the Emergency Standby Partnership Agreement). The specific terms and conditions for a particular Service Package deployment should be indicated in a Service Package Letter of Agreement (LoA). The LoA concerning a specific Service Package is signed directly between the Standby Partner and the Country Office. Such contributions are recorded as in-kind contributions to UNHCR. The in-kind contribution related to the Service Package is recorded at field level as part of the Country Office's Operations (OPS) budget, in coordination with the Division of External Relations (DER).

The following Emergency Standby Partners offer Service Packages to UNHCR operations:

- Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA)
- Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning of Norway (DCPEP)
- Emergency.lu, Luxembourg
- Ericsson Response
- German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW)
- International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP): *An informal umbrella organization for multinational cooperation between governmental emergency management agencies active in the field of humanitarian assistance. The IHP member agencies are: The Crisis Management Centre Finland (CMC), Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA), UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB), The Luxembourg Rescue Services Agency (ASS Lux), Estonian Rescue Board (ERB), Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW).*
- Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)
- Veolia

More details on the Service Packages are available at the following link:

<http://ihp.nu/ihp-modules-experts>.

Advice to request Service Packages:

To request Service Packages, contact UNHCR DESS Emergency Service (Emergency Preparedness, Deployments and Partnership Section / EPDPS - hqdeploy@unhcr.org) with the subject title "Request of Service Packages", copying the Regional Bureau covering your operation and the Senior Occupational Safety Officer of the Division of Human Resources. Requests should contain the following information:

- Type of Service Package required
- Brief description of emergency situations in country (displacement numbers, affected people's needs, UNHCR response)
- Area, location and expected duration of the operation
- A brief description of the UNHCR team on the ground
- A description of safety and security issues
- The required lead time for deployment

For the base camps specifically:

- Number of staff (to be accommodated in the Base Camp)
- Site specifications
- Types of facilities: office, accommodation, electricity, etc; and
- Need for security installations.

EPDPS/DESS contacts Standby Partners to seek their support. A Standby Partner who is interested to support may send a rapid technical field evaluation mission to the area concerned. If both an UNHCR operation and Partner agree, they proceed directly to transfer the Service Package. A Service package is formalized by a Letter of Agreement (LoA).

Service Package team members complete the same formalities and procedures as other individual standby partner deployees, except that Service Package teams may not be integrated in UNHCR's office structure and may have shorter deployments. Like individual deployees, service package team members may be accorded the status of 'UN expert on mission' - this depends on the LoA.

Service Packages are usually delivered to the capital initially. The CO will have to provide logistical support, including customs clearance processes, to the standby partner in country in order to secure land and ensure security/fencing in the case of base camps, as well as internal transport to the location.

Post emergency phase

Service Packages such as base camps are usually deployed to provide support in the emergency phase, with a limited lifespan depending on weather conditions as well as wear and tear (from 2 weeks up to a year, as stated above). This capacity is deployed with the understanding that the Office will look at establishing more sustainable accommodation and/or office arrangements, should it be required. In exceptional circumstances, Service Packages can also consist in longer-term construction projects accommodation and office space in protracted crises contexts.

4. Links

[Emergency Preparedness and Response Portal – Service Packages \(access for UNHCR... IHP Office and Accommodation Handbook IHP Service Packages\)](#)

5. Main contacts

CONTACT To request a Service Package, contact the Emergency Preparedness, Deployments and Partnerships Section (EPDPS) in the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) @ hqdeploy@unhcr.org

Addressing grievances (staff)

07 September 2023

Key points

- Try local conflict resolution mechanisms first.
- Contact the Ethics Office if you or colleagues face retaliation after reporting misconduct or cooperating with IGO missions.
- Report instances of misconduct.
- To protect principles of due process, the IGO should investigate instances of misconduct.
- The SpeakUp Helpline is a service available 24/7 to report your concerns in total confidence.

1. Overview

Addressing Grievances in UNHCR: Where to go for help is a brochure prepared by the informal Conflict Management Support Group in UNHCR. It advises staff members and others working with UNHCR on how to resolve problems, foster an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, and promote a harmonious work environment.

The brochure lists different offices and work units in UNHCR that can answer questions and provide support to staff when problems arise. It provides contact information for the Ombudsman Office, the Staff Health and Wellbeing Service, the Ethics Office, the Inspector General's Office, and the Legal Affairs Service, among others. The brochure is available in English, French and Spanish.

2. Main guidance

When and for what purpose

Addressing Grievances in UNHCR is written for all UNHCR's staff, and those who work with UNHCR, and is designed to help staff find solutions to workplace problems.

Summary of guidance and/or options

The Staff Health and Wellbeing Service provides guidance and psychological support, to individual staff during formal grievance processes, and to teams that are not functioning well.

The Ombudsman's Office is an informal conflict resolution mechanism. The Ombudsman may be consulted for guidance and support when efforts are being made to resolve conflicts and workplace problems informally. It can offer confidential advice on where to go for help.

The Division for Human Resources Management (DHRM) offers informal advice on human resources matters, including entitlements, contracts, administrative reviews (PAPS); performance

appraisal issues (PMU); medical concerns (MS); and human resources policy (Policy Section). Formally, the DHRM manages recourses and appeals with respect to postings, contracts, and non-granting of promotion (APPB/APPC Secretariats).

The Inspector-General's Office (IGO) is the mechanism that formally investigates allegations of misconduct. If misconduct is found to have taken place, the case is passed on to DHRM to decide on action. Certain cases, for example sexual exploitation and abuse, or retaliation (for reporting of misconduct or assisting in investigation of misconduct), are automatically directed to the IGO.

The Ethics Office gives confidential advice and guidance on standards of conduct and application of UNHCR's [Code of Conduct](#). It manages the Protection against Retaliation (whistleblower) policy, the [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) (PSEA) and the Annual Financial Disclosure Programme.

The Staff Council gives advice and makes referrals for informal resolution of grievances and advises on staff representation and staff-management relations. Most countries should have their own Staff Council, but all may contact and call upon the Staff Council at Headquarters.

The Legal Affairs Service offers staff legal advice on privileges and immunities, on their status as international civil servants, and on human resource matters.

The Peer Advisors Network (PAN) is a global network of UNHCR personnel who volunteer their time to support colleagues in need. The network is supported by the offices of Psychosocial Wellbeing, Ethics and Ombudsman, and is largely focused on colleagues who work in the field. All Peer Advisors are trained to give low intensity psychosocial support, provide guidance on dispute resolution and conflict, and act as ethical influencers throughout UNHCR. They respond to a range of issues pertaining to the needs of the individual, including conflicts and grievances in the workplace, wellbeing and psychological concerns, and critical incidents.

The **SpeakUp!** Helpline advises UNHCR personnel who want to report misconduct, including sexual harassment, or find out where they can go for help. Provided by an independent external entity, the service is available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, to all who work for UNHCR, regardless of grade, category or contract type.

Personnel have access to freephone, local rate and international dialling options (depending on their availability in the country). More information is available at:

<https://intranet.unhcr.org/en/about/ethics-office/speakup.html>.

A web-based reporting form can be downloaded at: <https://wrs.expolink.co.uk/UNHCR>.

A mobile App titled 'SpeakingUp' is also available for download.

How to implement this at field level?

- Make sure that all staff and all those who work with UNHCR are aware of the complaint mechanisms that are available to them.
- Ensure all staff are aware of the conflict resolution mechanisms, and psycho-social support,

that are available to them.

- Make available to all staff the brochure Addressing Grievances in UNHCR.
- Encourage staff to try to resolve problems at local level in the first instance, while confirming their right to make use of mechanisms at Headquarters.
- Contact the Ethics Office if any members of staff or individuals who work with UNHCR suffer retaliation for reporting misconduct or cooperating with IGO missions.
- When instances of misconduct arise, invite the IGO to investigate. Untrained staff should not conduct investigations because any breach of due process might affect the outcome of subsequent judicial proceedings.

Addressing Grievances in UNHCR: Where to go for help

Office	Type of Service	Contact Information
Inspector-General's Office (Investigations)	Formal: investigates allegations of misconduct.	Confidential Fax: Email:
		+41 22 739 7380 inspector@unhcr.org
Legal Affairs Service	Formal: provides legal advice to staff on privileges and immunities, status as international civil servants (notably on residency and taxation) and human resource matters.	Fax: Telephone: Email:
		+41 22 739 7391 +41 22 739 8015 HQL00@unhcr.org
Ethics Office	Informal: gives confidential advice on standards of conduct/application of Code of Conduct . Formal: manages protection from retaliation policy and Annual Financial Disclosure Programme	Confidential Fax: Telephone: Email:
		+41 22 739 7381 +41 22 739 8301/8794 ethicsoffice@unhcr.org
Psychosocial Wellbeing Section	Informal: provides guidance and psychological support, including to individual staff during formal grievance processes, and in team interventions.	Confidential Fax: Telephone: Email:
		+41 22 739 7370 +41 22 739 8001 HQS00@unhcr.org

Staff Council	Informal: provides advice and referrals to informal resolutions of grievances; advises on staff representation and staff-management relations.	Fax: Telephone: Email:	+41 22 739 7364 +41 22 739 8591 HQSR00@unhcr.org
Division of Human Resources Management	Informal: advises on HR matters, including entitlements, contracts, administrative reviews (PAPS); performance appraisal issues (PMU); medical concerns (MS); HR policy (Policy Section). Formal: handles recourses and appeals of decisions on postings, contracts, non-granting of promotion (APPB/APPCC Secretariats). Performance Appraisal Rebuttals (PMU).	APPB Email: APPCC Email: HR Policy Email: Medical Service: PAPS Email: PMU Email:	hqpe90@unhcr.org hqpe91@unhcr.org hqpolicy@unhcr.org hqms00@unhcr.org hqpe00@unhcr.org hqpu00@unhcr.org
Ombudsman's Office	Informal: offers guidance, advice and support to informal resolutions of conflicts and workplace problems; offers confidential advice on where to go for help.	Confidential Fax: Telephone: Email:	+41 22 739 7340 +41 22 739 7770 Ombuds@unhcr.org

Annexes

[Risk Management Tool_Duty of Care_OHS_Security](#)

3. Links

[Addressing grievances in UNHCR](#)

4. Main contacts

Ombudsman Office: Ombuds@unhcr.org.

Ethics Office: hgethics@unhcr.org.

Psychosocial Wellbeing Section: hqSW00@unhcr.org.

Inspector General's Office (IGO): inspector@unhcr.org.

Legal Affairs Service (LAS): hqLE00@unhcr.org.

[SpeakUp! Helpline](#)

Peer Advisors Network: PAN-Learning@unhcr.org

In case of sexual assault during employment

18 September 2023

Key points

- For Victim-survivors
 - Your safety and security are your first priority
 - Disclosing to a trusted person in your office will help us to put the appropriate support in place for you
 - You may need medical care and a PEP kit, including emergency contraception
 - Connect with the Victim Care Officer
- For managers and colleagues
 - Be compassionate, non-judgmental and respectful
 - Maintain confidentiality
 - Ensure access to medical care and PEP kit, including emergency contraception where needed
 - Follow the principles outlined in UNHCR's Policy on a Victim Centred Approach
 - Connect with the Victim Care Officer

1. Overview

A higher risk of violence, including sexual violence, exists in emergency responses. During emergency deployment, it is important everyone involved is familiar with and understands the principles of a victim centered approach in prevention and response to an incident of sexual assault of a colleague. Sexual assault comes under the UN definition of sexual harassment, for which there is a separate broader entry in this emergency handbook on other forms of sexual

harassment. This entry relates specifically to UNHCR's response to sexual assault.

A sexual assault is any sexual act that happens without consent. It is a serious incident that can have a profound impact on an individual. Victim-survivors should know they are not alone and that the organization is here to support them in a way that takes their needs into consideration and puts them at the center of our response.

Managers and colleagues must be aware of how to respond appropriately and sensitively, in a manner consistent with UNHCR's Victim Centred Approach policy, if a member of our personnel experiences sexual assault. The initial response i.e., the way in which managers and other colleagues handle an incident is critical to reducing the risk of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), secondary victimization or other harmful outcomes for a victim-survivor's wellbeing.

Although managers and colleagues play a critical role, they are not alone in organizing or managing the response. It is important to connect with the [Victim Care Officer](#) as soon as possible for further guidance.

The below advice provides practical guidance in the circumstances of sexual assault in emergency deployment. The advice is differentiated depending on whether you are a victim-survivor of a sexual assault or a manager/colleague supporting someone following a sexual assault.

2. Main guidance

The recommendations are separated into two categories:

- For victims-survivors of sexual assault
- For managers or a colleague of a member of personnel who has experienced sexual assault

Please select the heading that best meets your need.

A) I am a victim-survivor of sexual assault

Emergency deployments can be challenging environments. We find ourselves outside of our comfort zone, familiar context and environment, away from family, friends and familiar colleagues. In such an environment like this, it isn't easy to know where to turn for support when you find yourself in a crisis or a difficult situation.

If you experience sexual assault:

1. Get yourself to a place of safety.

Your physical wellbeing is paramount. For support to ensure your physical safety and security you can contact your local Field Security Advisor, who will observe confidentiality, or use the Electronic Travel Advisory (ETA) App on your phone. Managers, colleagues and friends can also support you. You should contact the person you are comfortable with.

2. Disclose your experience

You may find it difficult to share your experience with anyone else. It is your experience to choose to disclose or not to disclose. However, sharing what happened to you with a trusted person within UNHCR will allow us to respond in an appropriate way to support you and to aid your recovery.

3. Medical Care

You may need medical treatment. The Security colleagues or your manager will be able to locate the Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) kit in your office which you can take with you to the Medical clinic in case they do not have one available. Ask the doctor to collect forensic evidence as you may need this later.

Post Exposure Preventive (PEP) Treatment is an emergency medical response for individuals exposed to the HIV virus. PEP Treatment consists of medication, laboratory tests and counselling as well as emergency contraception. PEP Treatment must be initiated within hours of possible HIV exposure and must continue for a period of approximately four weeks. For information about the efficacy of the treatment and associated risks please contact [UNHCR's Medical Service](#).

4. Contact the Victim Care Officer

The [Victim Care Officer](#) provides psychosocial support, guidance and will coordinate with colleagues in order to ensure that the varied support you need - from physical safety concerns, to psychological wellbeing, to protection from retaliation to justice and resolution as well as your return to work are adequately met.

UNHCR has a [Victim Centred Approach Policy](#), which outlines the approach the organization should take when responding to Sexual Misconduct. The policy was designed in consultation with victim-survivors and based on published research to ensure we respond in a way that is appropriate. We want to support you in a manner that works for you. The following outlines how the principles of our Victim Centred Approach policy will be applied in cases of sexual assault.

Wellbeing and security first

In order to help you regain your sense of safety we will:

- Help to get you to an immediate safe space
- Help you get medical attention
- Connect you to the appropriate services to meet your immediate needs

This will be done collaboratively with you depending on your expressed needs and preferences. We will ask whether you feel safe currently and if not, where would be a safe space for you?

In an unfamiliar environment, it might be difficult to know where a safe place might be, which is why it is important to connect with Field Security colleagues. Field Security Services can support you in getting to a place of safety and link you to the appropriate support services such as medical support and the [Victim Care Officer](#) for psychosocial support. They will also be aware of

the available additional support in your location. If you do not feel comfortable with the local Field Security colleague, for example for reasons relating to gender, you can ask for someone of a different gender to be also present during your interactions. We will consult with you to ensure that the people around you are ones that make you feel safe and secure. If this is not the case then we will try to get you to be with people who make you feel safe and secure.

The [Victim Care Officer](#)- a clinical psychologist- provides specialist psychosocial support to victim-survivors in all UNHCR locations and is based in Geneva. However, if you would like psychosocial support face to face, and you have a Staff Counsellor available in your location, you may wish to contact them.

Assistance and support

Speaking with the Victim Care Officer is completely confidential.

The Victim Care Officer will

- Offer you confidential psychosocial support, guidance and accompaniment
- Coordinate the response and support offered by UNHCR
- If you agree, support you to get local support (medical or psychosocial) (available support will depend on your location)

Non-discrimination

We will ask what you need so we don't make inappropriate assumptions based on any of on your characteristics e.g., race, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity, language.

End to end holistic approach

- We will be mindful of how we engage with you from the first time we learn of your sexual assault.
- The Victim Care Officer will accompany you through administrative process until you both agree the support is no longer needed.

Give back a measure of control to the extent possible

- We will aim not to do things **to** you but rather to do things **with** you.
- We will do our best to share information with you, so you are aware of what is happening.
- We will seek your consent whenever possible before taking actions.
- We will consult with you and bring you into decision-making processes as much as possible and where appropriate.
- We will not overwhelm you. If you don't feel able to make decisions, then a core group of colleagues (Head of Office/Representative, Victim Care Officer, Security, Medical Doctor and Staff Counsellor) might need to make decisions in your best interest.

Confidentiality and informed consent

Maintaining confidentiality is an important part of maintaining trust. It is also vital to help you to regain your sense of trust.

- We will aim not to disclose information without your consent whenever possible.
- We will work to provide services whilst doing our best to maintain confidentiality.
 - In some cases, we can seek advice or guidance without sharing your name and personal information.
 - If there is a need to share information to safeguard your wellbeing or in order to link you with needed services, we will do our best to let you know in advance.
- We will share only needed information and make sure it is proportionate and related to the service being provided i.e not all your personal information, rather only select information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.
- We will endeavor to get your informed consent before taking actions
- We will not assume to know what is best for you.

Information

Information gathering

- We will think carefully about the information we ask you and how we ask it
- We will only ask for necessary information
- We will be mindful of when and how we ask for information
- We will be mindful of whether we are the right person to ask you for this information
- We will ask only the basic amount of information needed to best support you.

Information provision

- We will also think carefully about the information we share with you.
- We will do our best to be transparent
- We will be upfront and honest about what we can and cannot do
- We will keep you regularly updated
- In most cases you will be provided with updates about issues that relate to your situation by the Victim Care Officer.

Ask and listen

- We will only ask questions that are relevant to the immediate situation to provide you with the appropriate support.
- We will listen to you to understand your needs to support you appropriately.
- We will try to establish a safe space so that you are able to ask any questions, request updates or clarification.
- We will be available to listen and to make sure you feel heard.

Due Process

What happened to you may need to be reported to UNHCR's Inspector General's Office and/ or externally to local authorities.

B) If you are a manager or a colleague of a member of personnel who has experienced sexual assault

Emergency deployments can be challenging and we often find ourselves relying on our colleagues more as we are outside of our comfort zone. Managers and colleagues can both play an important role during a crisis or difficult situation. If you witness a sexual assault or if someone discloses an experience of sexual assault to you, then be mindful of the principles of the

[Victim Centred Approach Policy](#). The policy was designed in consultation with victim-survivors and is based on published research on what victim-survivors view as positive and negative experiences following a disclosure.

As a manager or colleague in an emergency context, an individual has either come to you directly to disclose a sexual assault or you may have been made aware of an incident of sexual assault. In both circumstances please:

1. use the principles outlined below to provide appropriate support
2. contact the [Victim Care Officer](#) for specific guidance in the situation

If the victim-survivor has disclosed to you, remember they chose to do so because

- They need support
- They trust you
- They feel safe with you
- They had no one else to turn to

It is important that the actions you take (or don't take) lives up to and helps to maintain that trust. Above all be kind, respectful and considerate. The first experience of disclosure for a victim-survivor should be a positive one, as it will likely impact the next decisions the victim-survivor/survivor makes. Some of the harmful actions that victim-survivors/survivors encounter are from people who are trying to help but take thoughtless or harmful actions. This can often stem from an anxiety to show that you care or are taking the situation seriously. However, you can best demonstrate care by showing empathy and listening to the victim-survivor. The best way to maintain the trust of a victim-survivor/survivor is to be honest and transparent with them. Let them know if you need to speak to someone for their safety or to get them the right support. You do not need to have all the answers. Reach out to the [Victim Care Officer](#) who can guide you in your response.

If the victim-survivor has not disclosed the incident directly to you, remember

- you do not need to speak with the victim-survivor directly
- follow the lead of the victim-survivor

It is OK for their main contact to be someone else that the victim-survivor is comfortable with, as long as you are helping to ensure that the affected colleague(s) is receiving the necessary

support.

The following outlines actions which managers and colleagues can take in line with the Victim-survivor Centred Approach Policy

Wellbeing and security first

Consider the victim-survivor/survivors physical and psychological safety.

- Are they in a safe space? If not, where would be a safe space and what is the safest way to get them there?
- Do they have access to medical attention as well as a PEP kit and emergency contraception?
- Do they have access to psychosocial support?
- Are they surrounded by people that make them feel safe and secure? If not, who might make them feel safe and secure and how can you get them to be with these people?

When considering physical and psychological safety, be transparent and collaborative with the victim-survivor. Let them know what is happening and ask them for their input. Don't assume you know best.

Assistance and support

The [Victim Care Officer](#) provides psychosocial support, advice, guidance and accompaniment to individuals who have had an experience of sexual assault. Let the victim-survivor know about this dedicated resource and connect them to the Victim Care Officer. If they do not consent, contact the Victim Care Officer yourself (without disclosing the identity of the victim-survivor for guidance on how you can provide assistance and support to the victim-survivor.

- Connect the victim-survivor to the Victim Care Officer if they agree
- Connect the victim-survivor to local medical support if they agree
- Let the victim-survivor know that additional psychosocial support can be sought through your local or regional Staff Counsellor

Non-discrimination

Don't make assumptions or judgements based on victim-survivor's characteristics e.g. race, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, health or other status.

- Do your best to accommodate the needs of the individual before you. The best way to do that is to ask what they need so that you don't make inappropriate assumptions.

End to end holistic approach

As one of the first responders, your initial encounter will help with the victim-survivor's recovery. Follow the principles of [psychological first aid \(PFA\)](#), The Pocket Guide found on pages 53/54 of the document gives a quick summary. Connect the victim-survivor with the Victim Care Officer so that all other necessary services (medical, administrative, psychosocial, judicial) are coordinated

on behalf of the victim-survivor.

Give back a measure of control to the extent possible

This means we don't want to do things **to** the victim-survivor but rather we want to do things **with** them. Do your best to share information with the victim-survivor so they are aware of what is happening. Seek their consent whenever possible before taking actions. Let them be part of the decision-making process as much as possible.

At the same time, it is important to not overwhelm the victim-survivor. If they are not in a state to make sound decisions then the Victim Care Officer can consult with a core group of colleagues (Head of Office/Representative, Victim Care Officer, Security, Medical Doctor and Staff Counselor) who may need to make collective decisions in the best interest of the victim-survivor.

Confidentiality and informed consent

Maintaining confidentiality is an important part of maintaining trust. Do not disclose information without the victim-survivor's consent whenever possible. If you need to share information for their wellbeing or in order to link them with needed services let the victim-survivor know in advance.

Remember you can often seek advice or guidance without sharing the name and personal information about the victim-survivor.

When you share information, only share what is needed by that person. Not everyone needs to know all the details of the incident. If someone has a specific role to play in responding to the incident, they just need to know enough information to provide their particular service. If you are unsure about the level of information to share, you can ask them what information they need to know.

Get informed consent from the victim-survivor before taking actions. Don't assume you know what is best for them. If there are certain actions you must take, then inform the victim-survivor of these actions and the reasons you need to take such actions.

Information

Information gathering

- Think carefully about the information you are asking of the victim-survivor and how you are asking it.
 - Is it necessary?
 - Is this the right time to ask it?
 - Are you the right person to ask it?
- Only ask the basic amount of information you need to best support them.

Information provision

- Think about the information you share with the victim-survivor.
 - Be transparent

- Be honest about what you can and cannot do
- Keep them regularly updated

It is important to provide the victim-survivor with updates about issues that relate to their situation. In most cases, this will be carried out by the Victim Care Officer. However, if the victim-survivor asks you for information, please update them if you are able to do so.

Ask and listen

Only ask questions that are relevant to the immediate situation. Ask the victim-survivor as little as possible such as: Where shall I take you to feel more safe? Are you injured? (to arrange medical care) what do you need? Is there anyone you want to call or inform?

Try to listen to the victim-survivor carefully. Avoid interrupting them or filling silences with questions or comments.

Due Process

- Do not investigate or try to establish the facts.
- What happened may need to be reported to UNHCR's Inspector General's Office and/or externally to local authorities. Contact the Victim Care Officer for advice.

Sexual Assault- Checklist for Managers

- Get the victim-survivor to a place of safety
- Ensure confidentiality
- Ask the victim-survivor as little as possible. Only ask what is necessary to address the immediate situation e.g where shall I take you to feel more safe? Are you injured (to arrange medical care or provide PEP kit and emergency contraception) what do you need? Is there anyone you want to call or inform?
- Connect with security colleagues for advice.
- Connect victim-survivor to the Victim Care Officer.
- Contact the Victim Care Officer yourself for further guidance.

3. Policies and guidelines

The main document that guides our response to sexual assault in an emergency setting is the [Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct](#). We follow the principle of Do No Harm.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) principles are also helpful in supporting someone following a traumatic incident. You can have a look at [Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers](#) for further tips on PFA. It is a document that was produced by WHO but endorsed by UNHCR. The Pocket Guide found on pages 53/54 of the document give a quick summary

Annexes

[Sexual Assault - Checklist for Managers](#)

[WHO, Psychological First Aid](#)

[Psychological First Aid Checklist](#)

[Risk Management Tool_Duty of Care_OHS_Security](#)

4. Links

[Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment](#)

5. Main contacts

For safety and security concerns contact your local **Field Security Service**

UNHCR Field Safety Section (FSS), Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS). At: HQFS00@unhcr.org

For medical advice contact the **Medical Service** 24/7 MEDICAL SECTION EMERGENCY CONTACT: +41227397399

For psychosocial support, advice and guidance about a sexual assault, please contact the **Victim Care Officer**:

Dr Zuhura Mahamed

mahamed@unhcr.org; Mobile +41 79 337 7940

To report a sexual assault to UNHCR's Investigation Service, please contact: **Inspector General's Office:** inspector@unhcr.org

Dealing with critical incidents and trauma (staff)

11 September 2023

Key points

- Seek safety and support.
- Be in contact with your family and friends.
- Check symptoms (acute stress reactions).
- Contact the staff welfare section.

1. Overview

A critical incident is a sudden, unexpected and overwhelming event, that is out of the range of expected experiences. You may feel intense fear, helplessness, horror and completely out of control. After such an abnormal event, most people experience reactions that are disturbing and difficult to accept.

Inform yourself about typical responses (acute stress reactions) you can expect in the aftermath of a critical incident, how to develop a 'healthy' response, and when to seek support.

Managers and colleagues should be aware that initial support is critical. How you support and respond to colleagues who have experienced a critical incident may influence the duration and depth of their symptoms.

2. Main guidance

Underlying policies, principles and/or standards

Critical incidents include:

- Accidents (such as traffic accidents).
- Hostage-taking or kidnapping.
- Incidents involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
- Natural or man-made catastrophes.
- Physical assaults.
- Rapes and sexual abuse or assaults.
- Armed or terrorist attacks.
- Torture.
- Riots or mob violence.
- Incidents involving mines or explosive remnants of war (ERW).
- War.

Critical incidents trigger an office-wide response.

Management. Ensure that services to persons of concern continue. Encourage staff well-being and team morale. Oversee the overall response.

Security. Save lives. Contain and manage the incident. Prevent others from being affected by it.

Health. Ensure a medical response when staff are physically injured.

Well-being. Help staff and others who are affected to understand and process the psychological impact of the incident.

Administration/human resources. Oversee arrangements for evacuation. Process Appendix D compensation claims and other administrative procedures.

For additional information, refer to UNHCR **Standard Operating Procedures for Supporting following Critical Incidents**, November 2014.

Good practice recommendations

It is important to recognize symptoms

Even after a critical event is over, you may experience strong physical and emotional reactions, or emotional aftershocks. These reactions are called acute stress reactions. They may be immediate or appear hours or days later.

Phase of Reaction	Common Types of Reactions	Tips
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Normal reactions in the first few hours after an event

- Mainly physical and perceptual.
- Related to 'fight or flight' nervous responses.

Mild reactions. Persons fixate on what happened, are not aware of their surroundings, gag, have a lump in their throat or a heavy feeling in the stomach, feel like crying.

Intense reactions. Time warps (moves too fast or too slowly); individuals experience hearing distortions or visual disturbances (see in great detail or have tunnel vision); they have tremors or 'the shakes'.

Allow yourself to be overwhelmed by your reactions.

Remind yourself that your reactions are normal.

Do not stay alone. Ask colleagues, friends or family to be with you.

Normal reactions in the first few days after the event

- Initially numb, you start to feel the impact of the incident as you begin to process it.
- Reactions related to higher levels of stress.

Mild reactions. Heart palpitations, stomach aches, heartburn, changes in bowel function (diarrhoea or constipation), muscle aches, difficulty sleeping (very common), decreased sex drive.

Intense reactions. Individuals feel numb, disbelief, function on 'auto-pilot'. They are inattentive, experience memory gaps, lose perspective. They are tense, irritable, feel isolated, feel no one cares or understands, are preoccupied by the event, are highly sensitive.

Get plenty of sleep and rest.

If you are able, exercise vigorously. Your body had been on high alert during the incident and needs to get rid of stress hormones.

Do not make major decisions. Give yourself time to adjust.

**Normal reactions
3-7 days after the
event**

◦ Fewer physical reactions; psychological and emotional reactions continue.

Mild reactions. Reactions seem abnormal outside the context of the event. Individuals start to experience harmful impacts on their family and work relationships.

Intense reactions. Individuals may have difficulty sleeping. They may have insomnia, or wake up suddenly; they may experience sexual difficulties. They may use alcohol or drugs to cope.

Individuals may have flashbacks, nightmares, feel a heightened sense of danger. They may have an increased startle response, and feel anger, blame, or guilt. They may isolate themselves, withdraw from social contact, feel alienated from people, avoid things associated with the incident. They may feel fear or anxiety about the future, feel numb, depressed, out of control, fear the event will recur. Family problems and misunderstandings may increase.

Spend time with trusted family members, friends and colleagues.

Tell your story, but only when you want and to whom you want. Wait until the timing feels right for you.

Try not to be critical of your behaviour during the incident. You were trying to survive.

Resume a routine.

Minimize use of alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and other drugs.

Practise stress management and relaxation techniques.

Take your time. Recovery is a gradual process.

Reference: International Critical Incident Stress Foundation Inc.

Following the incident, your first reaction may be to want to return as quickly as possible to your home. However, remaining with your team for a few days, if the conditions allow, may give you an opportunity to start working on your traumatic reactions with people who have gone through the same. These few days might help you to feel calmer and more ready to join your family back home. Should you prefer to depart immediately, do establish the contact with the Staff Welfare Officer for the follow up while you are at home.

Self-help

Your reactions may be powerful and unusual, especially in the week after the incident. In the hours immediately following the incident, you will not be able to do anything but will experience acute reactions that are part of your body's survival mechanisms. You should seek comfort and

support.

Try as much as possible not to isolate yourself. Spend time with people you trust. You do not have to share your experience if you do not wish. You will share them when it is the right time for you.

You should take as much rest as possible and be gentle with yourself. Give yourself the time to recover. Do not try to force the recovery process.

Get back to your normal routine, because this will help you to structure your day, to contextualize the incident, and minimize anxiety.

It is strongly recommended that you practice stress reduction and relaxation techniques (deep breathing exercises, progressive relaxation, meditation), do physical activities, play music or read.

The importance of support

For individuals who have survived traumatic incidents, the care and support of managers and colleagues can make a very great difference.

How long will symptoms last? When should I seek help?

Symptoms will be evident immediately after a critical event. They will diminish within days or weeks. Most people do not require 'psychological treatment. They work through their reactions by following their usual routines, supported by family and friends.

If symptoms persist for more than a month, it may indicate a stress reaction that could lead to a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In such cases, it is important to consult a staff welfare officer or a mental health professional.

You should seek help if:

- You feel that you cannot handle your intense feelings or physical sensations.
- The effects which followed the incident are getting worse not better.
- You continue to experience distressing thoughts, or physical or emotional symptoms.
- You continue to have nightmares or your sleep continues to be affected.
- You are using increased amounts of alcohol or drugs.
- Your responses are hurting your relationships with other people.

Considerations for practical implementation

Taking care of yourself after a critical incident

- Expect the incident to bother you.
- Expect to feel guilty: be gentle with yourself.

- Remind yourself that your reactions are normal.
- Learn as much as possible about acute stress reaction.
- Get plenty of sleep and rest.
- Spend time with trusted family members, friends and colleagues. Talk with them about the event. Talk about your immediate reactions as the incident was unfolding, particularly your thoughts and feelings.
- As much as possible, try to follow your routines and eat a balanced diet.
- Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, do physical activities, play music, read.
- Attend group debriefings and informational update meetings unless these deeply disturb you.
- Minimize use of alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, other drugs, and sugar.
- Contact staff welfare or visit a mental health professional.

Taking care of others (for managers and colleagues)

- Comfort and console the distressed person.
- Protect him or her from further threats or distress. Protect him or her from the media, onlookers, insensitive colleagues, and emergency workers.
- Meet his or her immediate physical needs and provide practical help.
- Facilitate social support. Provide access to a phone, contact supportive friends and family.
- Listen actively and supportively if he or she wishes to talk about the experience. If he or she does not wish to talk, respect his or her decision.
- Offer access to information, including information about the event. (What happened? Who was affected? How seriously? Where they are now?)
- Try to ground the person. Help him or her to identify specific goals, break tasks down into manageable sub-tasks, encourage a return to routine. At the same time, advise him or her not to undertake a heavy workload, take on demanding tasks, or work long hours, because this will impede the natural healing process.
- Assist him or her to find sources of help and support. Offer access to professional counselling.

Annexes

[Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief](#)

[Self Care during Deployment](#)

[Stress Symptom Scale](#)

[Stress Management-textbook](#)

3. Links

[Risk Management - Duty of Care, occupational health, safety and security Headington Institute](#)

4. Main contacts

UNHCR staff welfare officers:

Geneva - HQs

Dubravka SUZIC
Chief, Psychosocial Wellbeing Section
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7947
Mobile: +41 79 202 2417
PAMA: 90 4122 7947
SKYPE: dudasuzic
Email: suzic@unhcr.org

Verane BRAISSAND
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 8235
Mobile: +41 79 217 3191
PAMA: 90 4122 8235
SKYPE: verane.braissand
Email: braissan@unhcr.org

Sandrine ZUGER
Staff Welfare Officer
Office Telephone: +41 22 739 7764
SKYPE: sandrinez7
Email: zuger@unhcr.org

Seynabou BADIANE
Staff Counselor
Office Telephone: + 41 22 739 7605
SKYPE: seynabou009
Email: badiane@unhcr.org

Regional staff welfare officers

Lilian EWAGATA

Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Regional Support Hub
Nairobi, Kenya
Office Telephone: +254 20 4222 000 ext. 2610
Mobile: +254 735 337 609
PAMA: 90 254 02 2610
SKYPE: Lilian Ewagata
Email: ewagata@unhcr.org

Najlaa JARBOU
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile +963 930 230 708
Office Telephone: + 963 21 2240664 ext. 2116
Email: jarbou@unhcr.org

Wafika Reem TAFRAN
Assistant Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Damascus, Syria
Mobile + 963 993319722
Office Telephone: + 963 11 21812116
PAMA: 9096301 2116
SKYPE: Wafika Tafran
Email: tafran@unhcr.org

Achille KODO
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Dakar, Senegal
Office Telephone: + 221 33 867 6207 Ext 2155
Mobile: + 221 786 370823
PAMA: 90 221 01 2180
SKYPE: achille.kodo
Email: kodo@unhcr.org

Marieme DIOUF NDIAYE
Snr. Regional Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Amman, Jordan
Mobile + 962 79 570 43 64
Office Telephone: +962 6 5100 460 2117
PAMA: 90 96202 2117
Email: ndiyem@unhcr.org

Fadi HAMDJ
Staff Welfare Officer
UNHCR Beirut - Lebanon
Office Telephone: 41 22 331 5452

SKYPE: fadihamdi55

Email: hamdi@unhcr.org

Requesting deployments from emergency standby partners

22 September 2023

1. Overview

This entry will be available soon.

2. Main guidance

This entry will be available soon.

3. Policies and guidelines