

Staff Welfare Section – Staff Health and Welfare Service – DHRM - UNHCR

End of Assignment Debriefing (EAD)

Background

An end of Assignment Debriefing has been identified as one of the most important elements of staff care in humanitarian setting (Antares Foundation 2013, People in Aid, IASC 2007). This is an activity at the individual and/or group levels. While in most situations an individual end of assignment debriefing is provided, the group debriefing option is practiced by some organizations (Norwegian Refugee Council), both options have certain advantages and disadvantages.

In UNHCR, the end of assignment debriefings have been offered on a sporadic basis and the intention behind this initiative is to offer this type of support systematically to all staff members completing hardship and emergency assignments/missions. The EAD will serve as a complement to the psychological preparation for staff members assigned to hardship locations and emergency operations which was launched in October 2012.

An end of assignment debriefing, when applied appropriately, has proved to provide a range of long term positive impacts on the wellbeing of deployed staff, as well as on their commitment to the organization and its mission. The level of professional engagement of staff members who receive good psychological support at the end of their mission/deployment tends to remain at the same level as pre-deployment ones; as opposed to normally expected decline of the engagement level in relation to the number or length of field deployments.

Objectives of the End of Assignment Debriefing

When appropriately applied, EAD reduces the impact of possible trauma, vicarious trauma and burnout, including collaterals such as build-up of negative attitudes toward the organization.

With the launch of this programme in UNHCR the objective is that:

- At least 75% of the eligible staff who end an assignment or mission in D&E locations and/or in emergency operations receive EAD or opt for it.
- The EAD should contribute to the prevention of deterioration of personal sense of wellbeing (i.e. self-reporting on well-being remains at approximately the same level as pre-deployment ones).
- A systematic application of EAD for staff members in hardship and emergency operations will help monitor the need for referrals to mental health professionals.

Finally, given strong indications that both EAD as well as Psychological preparation are positively correlated to staff engagement, it is expected that they will contribute to high levels of staff engagement when measured by the Global Staff Survey.

Description of the End of Assignment Debriefing

The end of assignment debriefing usually includes a technical (operational) element and a psychological one (the psychological impact of that particular assignment on self and relations to others). Both factors are important and have a positive impact on general well-being and job

satisfaction. In UNHCR, technical debriefings are normally offered by managers and technical supervisors. For this reason the End of Assignment Debriefing will consist mostly of the psychological aspect.

The End of Assignment Debriefing is a facilitated reflection through the assignment which places the experience into a constructive perspective, facilitates closure and helps with the transition towards the next step. The aspects of EAD include

- work done including challenges and achievements,
- impact of the work on self, on personal/family life, as well as the relationships with colleagues
- exposure to stressors and hazards to personal wellbeing
- coping skills; and
- assessment of the psychological impact and the need for referral for further support if required

In view of the different lengths of assignments/missions, the variation in contractual status and diverse forms of deployment, the individual format of End of Assignment Debriefing is the most adequate one in terms of achieving the desired coverage as well as the most cost-effective approach. The average length of such a session is between 90 to 120 minutes to ensure that sufficient time is allocated. The session could be conducted in person whenever possible, or through telephone or video conference.

Target population

This programme will be systematically offered to UNHCR staff members in the international professional and the field service (FS) categories on mission or assignment to a hardship location (category D&E) or deployed to emergency operations in other categories of duty stations. The SWS will keep a record of relevant locations as well as of staff members eligible for EAD. The staff members will have three options: (1) to receive the EAD with a SWO, (2) to have the EAD with an external service provider; or (3) to opt out. Staff members will be expected to inform the SWS about their choice in writing. The estimated number of eligible colleagues is as follows:

- About 700¹ staff in the international professional category and FS category assigned or on TA in D&E locations (standard length of assignment is 1-3 years).
- About 300 staff in the international professional category and FS category are assigned or are on TA in an emergency operation (standard length of assignment is 1-4 years).
- About 100 staff members undergo an emergency mission through the Emergency Roster (WEM) a year.
- A number of staff members of different contractual categories are on temporary assignments of various lengths in D&E locations or in emergency operations.

The total number of staff who would be concerned by EAD is approximately 1000 a year.

The **End of Assignment Debriefing** programme (facilitated by the SWOs only) will be available upon request to the UNVs and the affiliated workforce serving in UNHCR operations in hardship locations (D&E) or in emergency operations.

¹ The estimates of beneficiary numbers are based on data on deployed staff in October 2013.

Staff members in non-hardship locations and non-emergency operations wishing to get psychological support in transitioning from one location to another can approach UNHCR'S SWOs who will facilitate the EAD for them.

EAD application

The EAD can be considered as the follow up on psychological preparation. given that the participants of this programme are the same as those benefiting from psychological preparation, The SWOs who previously engaged with the staff members in the process of psychological preparation will contact them one month prior to the end of their SAL or their temporary assignment. The distribution of the eligible staff amongst the SWOs remains the same as for the process of psychological preparation (Annex 1).

The colleagues on deployment through ECMS and the WEM roster will be notified by the ECMS to contact a dedicated SWO for the EAD.

Each staff member eligible will be offered an opportunity for the EAD with a (1) Staff Welfare Officer, with a (2) contracted external service provider or will be able to (3) opt out confirming that that the EAD is not needed at the moment offered. However, the confirmation will have to be sent to the SWS in writing. The standard form is attached (Annex 2)

Upon receipt of their preferred choice the SWO will take the following actions:

1) If the preferred choice is an EAD session with the SWO

- The SWO will set an appointment with the staff member
- Prior to the scheduled appointment the SWO will send a link with the on-line questionnaire to be completed prior to the EAD.
- Facilitate the EAD according to the UNHCR protocol (Annex 3)

2) If the preferred choice is an EAD with an external service provider:

- The SWO will confirm the choice by replying to the staff member concerned with a copy to the external service provider.
- The external service provider will be prompted to set up the appointment with the staff member
- The external service provider will send a link with the on-line questionnaire to be completed by the staff member prior to the EAD
- The external service provider will facilitate the EAD according to the UNHCR protocol.

3) Preferred choice is to opt-out.

- The SWO will confirm the receipt of the message to the staff member,
- The SWO will send a link with the on-line questionnaire to be completed by the staff member voluntarily.
- The SWO will provide the staff member with written resources relevant to the issue of closure and will remind the staff member of the availability of the SWOs in the future.

The SWO will record the contact with the staff member and the options in the MSRP data base for the purpose of statistics. The external service providers are obliged to keep a record of the number of staff seen through the process of EAD for the statistical purposes.

Staff members' choice of options is not linked to the choice made for the process of psychological preparation. It is not mandatory that the same person who did the psychological preparation provides the EAD.

Should a staff member be reassigned to another D&E location, the service provider (SWO or external) will remind the staff member of the psychological preparation for the next assignment. It will be necessary to the staff member to consider the three options available in relations to the psychological preparation.

The EAD is part of the end of mission/assignment HR checklist. The HR assistant will ensure that eligible staff members receive the opportunity to the EAD and that they contact the SWS accordingly.

Staff members deployed through the Emergency Roster is offered the EAD by the ECMS and the ERT roster manager and will be requested to respond directly to the SWS with the selected option. The affiliate workforce will be offered the opportunity for EAD unless their organizations have the same mechanism in place.

Confidentiality and Data Recording

The content of the EAD conversations is strictly confidential, as well as are the results of psychological tests that may be applied. The confidentiality can be breached only in case of identified suicidal or homicidal ideas as per the ethical obligations of the SWOs.

The Staff Welfare Officers will keep statistical records of sessions in the MSRP Workforce Management module, (without details of the content), accessible only to Staff Welfare Officers. The sessions with the affiliated workforce will be registered in a separate database until MSRP offers the possibility of registering them. The main purpose of recording the sessions is to monitor the coverage and response rates.

External counselors will report the number of EAD session and the names of staff who received the service to SWS but without reference to content of debriefings.

The Staff Welfare Section keeps a consolidated database including the number and names of staff members who received service, the name of the SWO, the number of sessions; as well as the number and names of staff members who declined the offered service (opt out).

Impact Assessment and Evaluation

Three levels of evaluation will be used:

- Level of services used – measured against MSRP and ERT data on end of assignment in D&E and emergency locations which will be checked every six months.
- Assessment of client satisfaction – a client satisfaction questionnaire will be sent to individual users by SWS one month following the EAD through the Monkey survey.
- Monitoring impact
 - Application of the psychological tool in the context of psychological preparation and after the EAD session;
 - Global Staff Survey level of engagement of staff that served in D&E location during the last three years;

Reservations about EAPS

Systematic implementation of EAD risks staff dissatisfaction with such a practice if it is not accompanied by a meaningful technical/operational debriefing. Some staff may see EAD as the Organization's over-emphasis on psychological aspects, with comparatively little attention to the content of the deployment/mission. They may feel there is a lack of interest on the organization's part regarding lessons learnt, especially when there is a degree of criticism involved. A good post deployment/mission de-brief should acknowledge staff comments about experience, including comments about operation's management. In brief, staff appreciates to be heard by relevant managers in addition to being heard by psychologists. There is much to learn from one's deployment both for the staff and for the organization. Therefore, ensuring that operational debriefing takes place is crucial as it would support and further strengthen the impact of the EAD.

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