



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

*Prepared by FAO Staff Counselling Unit  
Medical Service, FAO HQ  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
Rome, Italy 00153 (+39) 06 570 53577  
<http://intranet.fao.org/csd/csdm/counselling/>*

## ***FAO and Mobility***

As an international organization, staffed by and serving people all over the world, FAO expects that a significant portion of personnel will have, at some point, direct contact with and knowledge of our projects where they are active. This means that we commit to FAO's mandate not only from afar for the benefit of the regions, cities, villages and families who are food insecure, but that we work beside them also. Mobility is direct participation in FAO's *raison d'être*.

### ***Preparation for Mobility, Long Term Assignments with Family***

Some duty stations will be designated as family duty stations, and these deployments are variable in terms of comfort and ease of living. They are opportunities to be introduced to cultural richness and expand the horizons of ourselves and our children, to raise them to be citizens of the world; also as professionals, we are granted an opening to share knowledge and to gain knowledge and to further FAO's mission of global food security. There will be challenges and rewards, as with any meaningful pursuit. Cultural diversity and the unknown provokes both anxiety and curiosity, feelings of isolation and of solidarity, and our satisfaction with the experience of living and working abroad will depend greatly on our attitudes and coping skills.

#### ***Assess your personal circumstances:***

- *For yourself and loved ones, is there any vulnerability or on-going crisis? What provision or support system exists? Family problems can quickly escalate when compounded by a move to a foreign place.*

#### ***Find out details of the assignment:***

- *Learn as much as you can ahead of time about security risks and demands, living conditions, cultural norms, schools and recreational activities.*

#### ***Anticipate isolation and loneliness:***

- *Rely on your support network, music, books, family photos, and healthy habits (exercise, prayer, meditation, hobbies) as a refuge and comfort.*

#### ***Assess your history of resilience honestly:***

- *Do you have a positive attitude? Do you look after yourself? Can you effectively connect with others? Do you have a sense of purpose? You can take a brief snapshot of your resilience here: <https://www.testyourrq.com/>*

#### ***Keep a broad and accepting mind-set:***

- *Flexibility, observance, non-judgmental attitudes and curiosity reduce subjective feelings of stress and improve relationships. Plan area excursions. Immerse yourself in the local culture beyond the ex-patriot or UN culture.*

## ***Preparation for Hardship Duty Stations and Surge Team Deployments***

The work of the FAO and other UN and humanitarian organizations necessitates that our projects are in areas of the world that are stressed. It is likely that in your FAO career, you may be asked to go on mission to a duty station that is non-family, and challenges your physical and emotional comfort. This may be in a country engaged in a civil war, following a natural disaster, or experiencing an emergency situation for another reason. Preparing yourself well, both physically and mentally, will enhance your ability to do your job effectively, avoid burnout, and bolster your resilience to any difficulty you may encounter. Some resilience is innate and part of a person's core character, but it's also possible to improve your resilience by being mindful of how you choose to view events beyond your control. If you are not a natural optimist, you will have to practice looking for potential positives in the face of adversity, trauma and difficulty. Flexibility and coping skills will keep up your mood, productivity and effectiveness. Exercise, hobbies, and positive self-talk are examples of effective coping skills, while drinking, complaining, isolation and a sedentary lifestyle are avoidance mechanisms that will impair your ability to be a productive worker and negatively impact your mental health.

\* For additional good practice recommendations and even packing suggestions, please see UNHCR's article: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/45260/getting-ready-for-your-emergency-deployment#2,1461311055877>

\* To find out more about personal resilience, please see:  
<http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/4/resilience-of-aid-workers.pdf>  
<https://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-resiliency-quiz/>

\* For an excellent primer on the particular challenges facing humanitarian workers and a resource/workbook on building coping skills, please go here: [http://www.headington-institute.org/files/understanding-and-coping-with-traumatic-stress\\_module-1-copy\\_82697.pdf](http://www.headington-institute.org/files/understanding-and-coping-with-traumatic-stress_module-1-copy_82697.pdf)

The following questions are for you to reflect on. *Adapted from: <http://www.redcross.ca/who-we-are/jobs/be/ore-you-apply/are-you-ready-to-be-an-international-aid-worker>*

**Friends and Family:** *Can I put my personal life on hold at a moment's notice? Am I prepared to have little or no contact with loved ones for extended durations? Does my family or significant other support my decision? What are their concerns and how does their reaction impact my decision?*

**Health and Wellness:** *Do I handle stress in a healthy way, such as physical exercise, reflection, hobbies, and talking with others? Do I practice self-discipline? Do I have an optimistic outlook and healthy self-esteem?*

**Living Situation:** *Can I live in close quarters with others whose heritage, values, beliefs etc. are different from my own? How do I feel about living/working in areas of insecurity where my life may be in danger? Am I willing to follow strict security rules and regulations?*

**Professional:** *Do I thrive in a multi-cultural environment and accept the challenge of adapting to different cultures and work styles? Do I set realistic goals? Can I handle failure as well as success? Can I stay focused on the tasks at hand when faced with many other unmet and compelling needs? Am I self-motivated and able to make sound decisions without consultation, even in unfamiliar or ambiguous situations*

## **Additional Resources and Contacts**

### ***Managing Anxiety in the Field (and Elsewhere):***

[http://intranet.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/medical\\_center/documents/Managing\\_Anxiety\\_in\\_the\\_Field.pdf](http://intranet.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/medical_center/documents/Managing_Anxiety_in_the_Field.pdf)

### ***Consultations with Staff Counsellors (confidential)***

[Flavia.Donati@fao.org](mailto:Flavia.Donati@fao.org) + 39 06 570 55081

[Catherine.Saxbe@fao.org](mailto:Catherine.Saxbe@fao.org) + 39 06 570 53072