This chapter looks at the skills, attitudes and experience required to be a Civil Affairs Officer and at the conditions of work. The chapter aims to provide introductory guidance to help Civil Affairs Officers prepare for work in the field, cope with stress and manage expectations. The final section of this chapter discusses the importance of conduct and attitude for peacekeepers, including Civil Affairs Officers – both professionally and privately.

6.1. The Civil Affairs Officer profile

While the work of Civil Affairs Officers varies from mission to mission, there is a specific combination of knowledge, attributes and skills required for the role. Civil Affairs Officers are expected to demonstrate the UN competencies in communication, teamwork, planning and organizing, accountability, creativity and client orientation. Managers at different levels are expected to demonstrate a variety of UN managerial competencies, including leadership, vision, empowering others, building trust,
managing performance and judgement/decision-making. In addition to these standard UN competencies, officers and managers are expected to meet standards of professionalism that have been defined specifically for civil affairs work.

In 2010, the recruitment profiles for international civil affairs staff were updated, introducing three specializations in addition to a core profile. The core profile is that of an action-oriented problem-solver, able to build trust with local counterparts, coordinate and enable other actors, and conduct effective analysis. The three additional specializations require knowledge and expertise in:

(i) Programme management;
(ii) Conflict management; and
(iii) Support to state institutions.

At the entry level (P2), would-be Civil Affairs Officers must have some basic field experience in addition to meeting the “core profile” criteria. From the P3 level upwards, Civil Affairs Officers are expected to acquire some knowledge of these additional specializations. At the P3 level, Civil Affairs Officers are expected to have at least one of these specializations and at the P4 level they are expected to have at least two. From the P5 level and above, programme management becomes a core requirement together with one of the other two specializations.

A centralized Civil Affairs Roster of staff from the P2 to the D1 levels is managed in the Field and Personnel Division of DFS at UN headquarters. Generic job vacancies are periodically posted and candidates are assessed to ensure that they meet the requirements for civil affairs work, after which they may be selected from the roster by hiring managers without further formal process. This work attracts practical and dedicated people who want to be actively engaged in communicating and helping to address problems. Civil Affairs Officers come from diverse professional backgrounds, including, among others, INGOs/NGOs, UN agencies or international organizations, public administration/local government, grass-roots or community groups. Many Civil Affairs Officers have served in several missions, and bring a wealth of experience with them to every new mission. Civil Affairs Officers often move between roles within the DPKO, the broader UN family and beyond. Some begin their careers as National Professional Officers (NPOs) in their own country and move on to

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33 Further information about the UN competencies can be found in the Recommended resources section at the end of this chapter.

34 The formal rules for staff selection are laid out in ST/AI/2010/3: Administrative Instruction: Staff Selection System, which can be found at http://iseek.un.org/LibraryDocuments/1209-20100513022219853947.pdf. A Standard Operating Procedure on application of this guidance in UN peacekeeping is forthcoming.
an international post in another mission. Civil Affairs Officers often have transferable skills, such as project and programme management, which allow them to move to UN agencies or other organizations. For those whose long-term professional interests lie in civil affairs, career progression may enable more senior staff to assume managerial or head of office coordination functions in addition to cultivating expertise in a specialized area.

Civil Affairs Officers tend to spend longer in a given mission and function than other substantive components. The relatively long period (on average three years)\(^{35}\) that Civil Affairs Officers stay in post means that they often provide the institutional memory and continuity in relationships with local actors, and that they develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of the context. While this has significant benefits, in thinking about their career progression Civil Affairs Officers should also be mindful that, after many years in one mission, it may become more difficult to maintain “distance” and impartiality in relation to conflict issues and actors.

### 6.2. Conditions of civil affairs work

Civil affairs work is highly field-based with three-quarters of personnel stationed outside mission headquarters, often far away from the capital. The conditions of work can be a source of both significant challenges and rewards. The role often requires living and working in isolated – and sometimes insecure – areas with basic living conditions where access to material comforts, technological capacity, social and professional engagement is limited. In some cases, the choice of food staples and other supplies is constrained by what can be procured locally. These conditions can create a sense of isolation and may exclude Civil Affairs Officers from the kind of recognition and visibility that is often tied to proximity to mission headquarters, its leadership and decision-makers. At the same time, however, Civil Affairs Officers often earn the recognition and trust of key interlocutors – the host community. This field presence also enables Civil Affairs Officers to better understand local dynamics and is often central to their ability to build the credibility of the mission in the eyes of the population.

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\(^{35}\) Figure from “Civil Affairs Guidance and Training Needs Assessment” (2008).
“How would you describe the living and working conditions in a newly established field office?”

I was posted in Fishtown in Liberia, where the office had just opened and was functional but only at the most basic level. The office was based in a room made up of two prefab containers within the UNMIL compound. Aside from civil affairs and the Ethiopian battalion stationed there, only UNPOL and the Electoral Division had a presence in the region. It was so remote that there were no NGOs with international staff stationed there. From the first day of my assignment, I lived just outside the compound in a mud-and-sticks house without electricity or running water. In the absence of suitable accommodation, some colleagues were sleeping in their offices. During the two years I was stationed in Fishtown, I spent a lot of time and energy advocating for improvements to the security, living and working conditions of the compound. It was particularly difficult during the long rainy season from June to October when the roads became impassable.

In order to prepare for my deployment, I took with me a GPS system, portable satellite phone and IT equipment. I also had to equip my vehicle with the tools to survive should I be stranded given the extreme driving conditions. Overall, it was a significant personal and professional experience for me to be deployed to such a hardship and isolated duty station. The permanent presence of our team made a difference for the local population in such a neglected area and they were extremely grateful for our assistance.

Box 6.1 Voices from the field: “How would you describe the living and working conditions in a newly established field office?”

A Civil Affairs Officer from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) facilitates a reconciliation conference in Dilling, south Khordofan, Sudan
6.3. Managing stress

While the conditions outlined above can create a sense of solidarity among colleagues and between the mission and host community, they can also exacerbate stress. The uncertainty of working in a new cultural context and the pressure to work long hours with limited recreational options can make it difficult to maintain a work–life balance. Like other peacekeepers, Civil Affairs Officers often live and work with communities that have suffered significantly as a result of conflict and may be faced with requests for assistance that they have no capacity to meet. These and other factors can place significant stress on both individuals and teams. Living alongside colleagues who are subject to the same pressures can compound this and work-related stress can spill over into the personal lives of staff. While stress and anxiety are normal reactions, they can damage physical, mental and emotional well-being if left unchecked. It is important that Civil Affairs Officers recognize stress both in themselves and colleagues and develop mechanisms to minimize the negative impact on their happiness, health and ability to function properly.

From the toolkit:

**Strategies for Stress Management**

- Identify and, if possible, address the sources of stress
- Develop your time-management skills
- Get adequate rest and use your R&R regularly
- Eat regularly and, where possible, eat a well-balanced diet
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine
- Keep in touch with friends and family
- Pursue physical or creative activities, such as exercise or art/music
- Recognize the signs of stress and know your limit
- Seek help through contacting the staff counsellor in your mission or at headquarters in New York

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Box 6.2 From the toolkit: Strategies for stress management

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36 Content of the box was adapted from “Mission readiness: preparing for fieldwork” (United Nations Office of Human Resources Management, March 2005).
Peacekeepers often deploy within the context of ongoing instability and may also be exposed to situations that cause trauma. Civil Affairs Officers may be especially vulnerable to trauma due to the unusual circumstances of their environment. Professional support from staff counsellors or other resources are recommended to cope with this. It is also important to remember that the host population, including local partners and national colleagues, may have experienced and witnessed deeply painful things over the course of the conflict. Frequently, experiences of trauma only emerge once it is safe for individuals to consider them.

**Civil Affairs Handbook**

“How do you manage stress and maintain a work–life balance while working in an isolated duty station?”

I served as the acting Head of the Office in the Goz Beida Regional Office of the mission in Chad. The duty station took a long time to fully set up because it was in an isolated area and the bad quality of the roads meant it was difficult to transport the materials needed to construct the base. The security situation was also unstable, with attacks from rebels recorded in the area many times, including against UN vehicles. We were not able to leave the base without an escort.

It was a stressful environment to live in, largely because it was impossible to find private accommodation outside the base. We all worked and lived in our office. We had to share rooms with colleagues – strangers – and we did not have enough rooms, nor enough water for our shower...

In fact, this was the toughest thing in the beginning... no daily shower!! However, after visiting the area, meeting with local authorities and listening to other UN agency colleagues, the stress did not affect me in the same way. Compared to the living conditions and suffering of the population in that region my problems began to seem minor and insignificant.

The most effective way that we found to manage stress was through parties that we organized on Saturday evenings. We invited our partners and clients, including UN agency personnel, NGO staff and local authorities. As well as helping to manage our stress, this also contributed to strong working relationships with our partners – everyone looked forward to meeting again the following weekend. Another key factor was being able to link to the outside world, and particularly with our families, through the use of PIN codes that enabled us to use the communications equipment.

Name: **Blandine Umurerwa**

Civil Affairs Officer, MINUSTAH

Civil Affairs Officer, MINURCAT: 2008–2010

**Box 6.3 Voices from the field: “How do you manage stress and maintain a work–life balance while working in an isolated duty station?”**

37 Ibid.
6.4. Managing your own expectations

In post-conflict settings, indigenous capacity is often severely depleted as a result of conflict. In the absence of infrastructure or capacity, ordinary tasks may take much longer to carry out. It is therefore critical that peacekeepers scale their own expectations for the completion of mandated tasks to the exigencies of post-conflict environments. Living and operating in a post-conflict environment requires a special temperament to cope with undue physical and emotional demands.

Different conceptions of time, poor or non-existent infrastructure, and frequent civil strife may all impinge upon the efficiency of Civil Affairs Officers in carrying out their tasks. Civil Affairs Officers, like local communities, may have unrealistically high expectations of what can be achieved and may get frustrated by slow progress. This can be particularly true of work that involves support to state institutions and governance, where progress is not measured in months but years or even decades. At times they may resent working with local interlocutors who appear to be less invested in positive change than the officers themselves. They may start believing that change is not possible and can become more passive and less consistent in pursuing the goals and objectives set in their workplan. This is something that Civil Affairs Officers need to be aware of and have to manage by recognizing and valuing even marginal progress over time.

6.5. Conduct and attitude

The professional and private conduct of peacekeepers can have a significant impact on the legitimacy and credibility of the mission. The line between professional and personal conduct can easily become blurred in small duty stations and field missions where individuals are highly visible. The nature of civil affairs engagement with local authorities and communities means that these components are particularly influential in shaping local perceptions of the mission. Civil Affairs Officers, like other peacekeepers, must therefore be conscious of the way they behave both on and off duty.

If the Security Council gives the legal basis for a mission’s work, in many ways it is civil affairs that gives the work its legitimacy at the field level. In many places where mission field offices are set up, it is the first time that a community has experienced a large international presence. Part of the work of civil affairs is to overcome that distance and help convince the population that the disturbance to their lives is justified by the benefits that the mission can bring. Even in circumstances where peacekeepers are seen as life-savers, there is a need for permanent legitimization of the mission, which
In a survey conducted in 2008, Civil Affairs Officers were asked what they considered the most important values, attitudes and approaches for civil affairs work. Below are some of the responses from the civil affairs community.

- “Patience, impartiality, humility, flexibility and a positive results-focused attitude are essential.”
- “It is important to be genuinely committed to your task, the longer term objectives and to have a positive attitude.”
- “An authentic interest in and respect for local cultures and values.”
- “Taking an approach that focuses on the empowerment of local people and their ownership of the process is important.”
- “Professionalism, integrity and respect for diversity.”
- “Team spirit and consensus building.”
- “Open-mindedness, creativity, tenacity and a hardworking attitude.”
- “Willingness and energy to adapt and ‘go the extra mile’.”
- “Exemplary staff conduct within and outside working hours in order to project and maintain a positive image of the mission among local communities and external counterparts.”

is normally best done by regular contact and building up good relations with the local community – a role discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

Many of the places where peacekeeping missions deploy had high poverty levels prior to the conflict, and these have often been exacerbated by the violence. It is important that Civil Affairs Officers are mindful of economic and other power differentials that may apply to the relationships between peacekeepers as assistance providers and the host population as beneficiaries, as well as between international and national personnel. To a certain extent, peacekeepers have the power to provide or renego security, to give or take away aid and to stay or evacuate when the situation escalates. From “United Nations Pre-deployment Guide: An Introduction to Peacekeeping Operations” (forthcoming).
example, avoiding excessive displays of consumption and considering the security implications of your actions for national colleagues.\(^{39}\) It is also important to be aware that relationships – whether emotional, financial or work-related – between staff members and the local communities they serve could be seen as potentially involving an abuse of power or a conflict of interest.\(^{40}\)

Staff regulations and rules entitled “Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members” outline the “code of conduct” for UN personnel. If UN personnel act with impropriety or impunity it may damage the credibility of the mission in the eyes of local people. Furthermore, failure to hold UN personnel accountable for their actions also sets a poor model for countries working hard to re-establish the rule of law.\(^{41}\) Demonstrating understanding of and respect for local laws, norms, customs and practice is essential in maintaining credibility and establishing a mutually respectful relationship between the mission and the host community. This includes adhering to the UN code of conduct and core values (integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity) and abiding by local laws. The importance of impartiality and of sensitivity to gender, culture and diversity in civil affairs work are discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

6.6. Information and training for Civil Affairs Officers

While this Handbook is intended both as an induction for new Civil Affairs Officers and as a reference guide, it is inevitable that questions and situations will arise for which it cannot offer guidance. Fortunately, however, there is an active guidance and support network available for Civil Affairs Officers to tap into in order to share experiences, learn best practices and seek peer support. The Civil Affairs Network, comprising more than 650 members, is an online forum where training events, queries from the field, relevant literature and best practices are shared. Anyone with a UN email address can join the Civil Affairs Network by sending an email to the address in the Recommended resources section at the end of this chapter.

The civil affairs team in the Policy and Best Practices Service (PBPS) facilitates the network and is also available for policy, advisory and advocacy support for civil affairs components. Civil Affairs Officers are encouraged to take an active role in capturing and sharing good practice and lessons learned from their own experiences. There are a number of other online networks with cross-cutting relevance to civil affairs (for

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\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) “Working together: Putting ethics to work” (Ethics Office, United Nations Office of Human Resources Management).

example, protection, DDR, integrated mission planning and mediation, among others) that may be of interest. All of these online networks, along with a wealth of internal documents, policies and reports, can be found on the DPKO intranet.

Finally, there are both generic and specialized skills training programmes for civil affairs. In 2009–10, a new approach to training civil affairs components was developed and introduced. The training focuses on a range of key skills including: conflict analysis; strategic planning; negotiation, mediation and facilitation; mobilization and coordination; and encouragement and support for local actors (state and civil society). Training is delivered in-mission, using participatory methodology with case studies and exercises that focus on the country context, the mandate and the challenges of civil affairs work in that specific context. Components are trained as a team and modules are tailored specifically to the implementation of the annual workplan of the unit, contributing to team-building and coherence of effort. Sometimes the training is linked up to the component’s annual retreat, so that the tools can be used to facilitate joint analysis and planning. Specialized training for QIP programme managers was also launched in 2010.

As budgets allow, Civil Affairs Officers can also avail themselves of other training opportunities offered through partner training institutions in topics such as reconciliation, conflict management and protection of civilians. The Integrated Mission
Training Centre (IMTC) is a good starting point to enquire about potential training opportunities, as well as the UN System Staff College (UNSSC). Also, as noted above, joining the Civil Affairs Network is a good way to get information about relevant training institutes as well as upcoming courses. Finally, there are a wealth of online resources available, including an extensive collection of web-based skills development courses for UN staff on SkillPort (referenced below) allowing staff to develop their competencies at their own pace.
### Recommended resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ethics Office</td>
<td>Information and guidance on ethics can be accessed via the Ethics Office page on iSeek. Resources include the UN code of ethics (draft 2008) and a guide to putting ethics into practice entitled “Working together: Putting ethics to work”.</td>
<td>UN peacekeeping personnel can access this via iSeek, the UN Secretariat intranet: <a href="http://iseek.un.org">http://iseek.un.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status, basic rights and duties of United Nations staff members (ST/SGB/2002/13)</td>
<td>UN “code of conduct” document that outlines the formal rules about how UN staff should behave.</td>
<td>UN peacekeeping personnel can access this document via iSeek, the UN Secretariat intranet: <a href="http://iseek.un.org">http://iseek.un.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Counsellor</td>
<td>The Staff Counsellor’s office home page contains details of counselling services and resources for UN personnel.</td>
<td>UN peacekeeping personnel can access staff counselling resources under the topics “health and wellness” on iSeek, the UN Secretariat intranet: <a href="http://iseek.un.org">http://iseek.un.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Affairs Network</td>
<td>The library and discussion forum are full of information about the work done by civil affairs components in missions. The online network is also a place where all Civil Affairs Officers can ask for information or share ideas.</td>
<td>People with a UN email address can request access to this network by emailing: <a href="mailto:dpko-civilaffairsnetwork@un.org">dpko-civilaffairsnetwork@un.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil affairs in-mission skills training package</td>
<td>Guidance for missions preparing to organize skills training as well as a manual for trainers, including PowerPoint presentations that accompany the modules.</td>
<td>UN peacekeeping personnel can access this document via the civil affairs page on the POINT intranet: <a href="https://point.un.org/SitePages/civilaffairs.aspx">https://point.un.org/SitePages/civilaffairs.aspx</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>UN Competency Development – A Practical Guide</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Sets out the key competencies required for UN work, and provides practical guidance for staff members on how to develop them.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>An online training resource available to UN staff with many courses to help them develop their skills. Can be used directly or in conjunction with the UN Competency Development guide above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
<td><a href="https://un.skillport.com">https://un.skillport.com</a></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>The website contains details of all (online and face to face) UNSSC courses, seminars and workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.unssc.org/home/">http://www.unssc.org/home/</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>The Peacekeeping e-Research Package</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Provides peacekeeping staff at headquarters and in field missions with access to a common set of online databases for international affairs, global news, country profiles and analysis of geopolitical dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
<td>UN peacekeeping personnel can access this via the POINT intranet: <a href="https://point.un.org/SitePages/eresearchpackage.aspx">https://point.un.org/SitePages/eresearchpackage.aspx</a></td>
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