

Midterm Review of the Partial Resumption of Rotations of United Nations Uniformed Personnel in a COVID-19 Environment

February 2021

Executive Summary

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary-General in April 2020 temporarily suspended rotations of Military and Police personnel in United Nations peace operations as part of broader efforts to mitigate the risk of transmission amongst United Nations personnel, host communities and Troop- and Police Contributing Countries. Rotations of uniformed personnel partially resumed in July 2020. In spite of challenges to rotations due to COVID-19 outbreaks, movement restrictions and broader precautions necessitated by COVID-19, the partial resumption of rotations has been largely successful with a steady increase in the number of completed and ongoing rotations.

Key drivers behind the successful resumption of rotations of uniformed personnel:

1. The promulgation of the Secretary-General's **Transitional Measures for a Partial Resumption of Uniformed Rotations in a COVID-19 Environment** to accommodate the special measures required to ensure safe rotations; and concerted efforts of Troop- and Police Contributing Countries and missions to effectively implement the **rigorous quarantine requirements** and broader preventive measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19.
2. The deliberate efforts of missions to accommodate the quarantine requirements, while **readjusting existing capacity to ensure continued mandate delivery** combined with efforts to tailor rotation plans to ensure sufficient uniformed capacity for priority tasks and the flexibility shown by Troop- and Police Contributing Countries in extending the tour of duty for some uniformed personnel to minimize operational gaps.
3. The **enhanced pre-deployment efforts** of Troop- and Police Contributing Countries to prepare military and police personnel for deployment in a COVID-19 environment through COVID-19 pre-deployment training modules; and promulgation of **COVID-19 specific guidance and training modules** tailored to peace operations by the Secretariat, including COVID-19 guidance targeting Troop- and Police Contributing Countries.
4. The establishment of **integrated structures to coordinate rotations** at United Nations Headquarters and in missions, bringing together medical, strategic movement and uniformed expertise to align operational requirements with the need to rotate personnel in a manner compatible with COVID-19 preventive measures and enhance day-to-day coordination with Troop- and Police Contributing Countries.
5. Continuous efforts by missions and Troop- and Police Contributing Countries to **maximize quarantine capacity** in missions through decentralization and increasingly quarantining in sectors; expansion of contingent camps; import of prefabs; and increased coordination across military and police personnel.

Key recommendations to strengthen uniformed rotations going forward:

1. The Secretariat should **maintain the current quarantine requirements for formed units**, in line with WHO guidance, to minimize the risk of import/export of positive COVID-19 cases; systematically monitor the impact on mandate delivery and put in place mitigating measures, where required.
2. DPO and DOS should **consider an adjustment of the mandatory quarantine requirement for Individual Uniformed Personnel** and delegate the decision to the respective Designated Official in country, in line with the approach for civilian personnel and UN Medical Directors guidance.
3. DPO and DOS should ensure **early engagement with Troop- and Police Contributing Countries** and timely circulation of approved rotation plans, preferably with a lead time of three months, to ensure sufficient time to prepare Military and Police personnel for deployment in a COVID-19 environment. Missions and Troop- and Police Contributing Countries should continuously seek to **minimize changes to the agreed rotation schedules**.
4. DPO and DOS should, building on ongoing mission efforts and the communication plan circulated to missions, further engage with uniformed mission leadership, contingent commanders and Troop-and Police Contributing Countries to **explore options for enhanced reporting and broader challenges related to stigma**.
5. DPO and DOS should continue to **closely monitor any challenges to quarantine capacity** and engage with relevant missions to find solutions. Support missions with outreach to Troop- and Police Contributing Countries and/or host states (e.g. for infrastructural support) as needed.
6. DPO and DOS should **supplement detailed COVID-19 guidance with short and concise “checklists”** to support missions and Troop-and Police Contributing Countries. Short guidance videos/webinars could supplement written guidance and also be used for pre-deployment and in-mission training.
7. DPO and DOS should explore options to supplement existing updates to Troop-and Police Contributing Countries with **more information on COVID-19 cases and outbreaks in missions**. Options to make more mission specific information and guidance available should also be explored.
8. Troop- and Police Contributing Countries should continue to **ensure that new deployments are equipped with adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment** and other preventative materials, in line with the Troop-and Police Contributing Countries deployment checklist for COVID-19.
9. DOS and missions should continuously **monitor empty flight hours and the broader financial impact** of quarantine requirements for rotating personnel as part of the overall assessment of the financial impact of COVID-19.
10. DPO and DOS should explore options to facilitate the **exchange of good practices and lessons learned** in COVID-19 response and preparedness efforts across Troop-and Police Contributing Countries as well as across missions.

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1. INTRODUCTION: ROTATION OF UNIFORMED PERSONNEL DURING COVID-19

Background

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary-General in April 2020 temporarily suspended rotations of uniformed personnel in United Nations peace operations as part of broader efforts to mitigate the risk of transmission amongst United Nations personnel, host communities and Troop-and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs).

Rotations of uniformed personnel partially resumed on 1 July 2020, in accordance with the Secretary-General's ***Transitional Measures for a Partial Resumption of Uniformed Rotations in a COVID-19 Environment***. The objective of the transitional measures, initially applicable until 31 December 2020 and subsequently extended until 31 March 2021, is to allow rotations to resume to maintain missions' uniformed operational capabilities for mandate delivery, while at the same time minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission amongst host communities, UN personnel and T/PCCs, and mitigating any reputational risk to the Organization.

Central to the resumption of rotation of uniformed personnel is the establishment of a rigorous quarantine regime that mitigates, to the maximum extent possible, the risk of UN uniformed personnel becoming a vector of COVID-19. To this end, missions were requested to establish maximum quarantine capacity to absorb incoming uniformed personnel during rotations, in line with health regulations and recommendations put forward by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Secretariat.

The transitional measures, and other COVID-19 supplementary guidance, also require missions to establish track and trace systems and put in place broader preventive measures; and for T/PCCs to implement pre-deployment quarantine measures, bring personnel protective equipment and integrate COVID-19 considerations into preparedness efforts.

To assess the implementation of the transitional measures, the Secretary-General committed to a midterm review of the transitional measures *“based on developments in the COVID-19 situation and other factors such as the availability of sufficient diagnostic testing capacity and vaccine development in order to define the measures required following the end of the transitional period [...]”*

Objectives of the midterm review

The midterm review aimed to 1) **capture lessons** from the first three months of rotations, including emerging good practices; and 2) **identify ways to strengthen rotations going forward**, including policy adjustment and broader corrective measures to address any gaps and continued causes of rotational delays, as well as means to ensure that good practices are replicated going forward.

Methodology

The midterm review was conducted by the Troop- and Police Rotations Sub-Working Group established under the Field Support Group for COVID-19 in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Department of Peace Operations; and Department of Operational Support, respectively, with the support of the Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training in the Department of Peace Operations, hereafter the “review team”.

The midterm review builds on the findings of a light after-action review undertaken in August 2020 to capture early lessons on the implementation of quarantine measures by field missions.¹ Building on the findings from the after-action review, the review team developed a survey with follow-on questions for missions that conducted rotations between July and November 2020 and conducted in depth interviews with mission personnel from MINUSMA, UNAMID, UNIFIL and UNSOS/M.

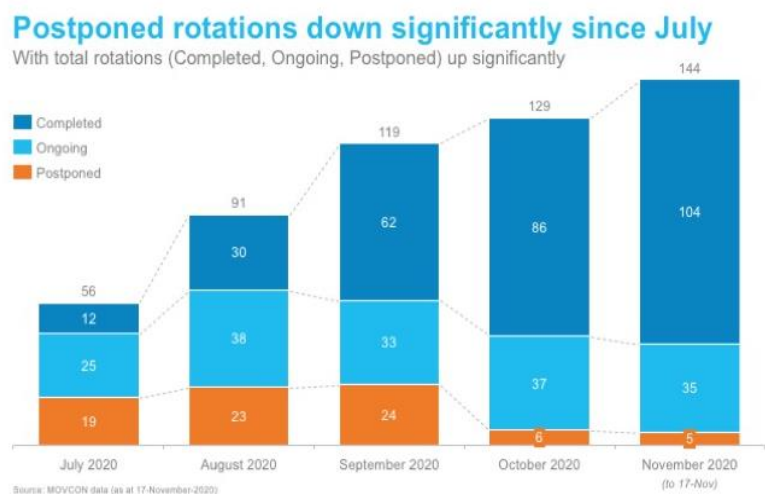
The review team also engaged with T/PCCs through a survey that was sent to all of the 66 T/PCCs whose personnel was being rotated. 25 T/PCCs provided feedback to the survey. Supplementary interviews were conducted with representatives from the Permanent Missions of Egypt, India, Nepal and Rwanda.

Report structure

The report is divided into five sections. It starts with an overview of the current status of rotations, followed by efforts to enhance rotations planning and minimize operational impact; measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 during rotations; and finally, the preparedness of military and police personnel.

2. STATUS OF THE RESUMPTION OF ROTATIONS

The resumption of rotations has been largely successful, with a steady increase in the number of completed and ongoing rotations following an initial period with delays caused by, among others, COVID-19 outbreaks amongst rotating military and police personnel, delays in flight clearances and the issuance of visas, and challenges to in-mission quarantine capacity.



¹ MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS were interviewed for the light after-action review. A survey was sent to all missions that had undertaken rotations.

Whereas in July, August and September 2020 the rotation of between 19 and 24 units was delayed, as of 17 November only 5 units were delayed. In total 33,382 personnel were rotated between the beginning of July and mid-November.²

The rotation of uniformed personnel in peace operations is under normal circumstances a complex exercise that requires close coordination between T/PCCs, UN Headquarters and field missions. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing complexities and introduced a myriad of new challenges including movement restrictions, quarantine and COVID-19 testing requirements introduced by host- and transit countries. This has increased the need to synchronize efforts across T/PCCs, the Secretariat, missions and host states, and has had a significant impact on the planning horizon and variables to take into consideration.

Key factors driving the increase in rotations

Consultations with T/PCCs, missions and stakeholders at Headquarters point to four key factors that impacted on the successful implementation of rotation plans: 1) the rotation planning structures in place and alignment of logistical, medical and operational considerations 2) efforts by missions to maximize quarantine capacity, 3) effective implementation of the quarantine regime and broader efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19, and 4) the preparedness of uniformed personnel, including through effective communication and coordination between the UN and T/PCCs.

3. EFFORTS TO ENHANCE ROTATION PLANNING AND MINIMIZE THE OPERATIONAL IMPACT

Military and police personnel are a vital component for effective mandate delivery in peace operations, where the more than 80,000 uniformed staff constitute the vast majority of personnel.³ The resumption of rotations was critical for continued mandate delivery, however equally a significant cause of concern for the potential risk of becoming a vector of COVID-19 transmission.

Impact on operational capacity

The mandatory 14-day in-mission quarantine period for all incoming uniformed personnel impacts on the operational capacity in missions and number of troops and police available for operational tasks such as patrols. The pre-deployment and in mission quarantine, combined with other factors, has equally had an impact. For example in UNMISS where the combined pre-deployment quarantine requirement, delays in visa clearances, and limitations to quarantine capacity due to the requirement to quarantine in Juba has caused delays in deployment.

Despite the reduced operational capacity, missions have overall been successful in adapting operations to the new reality and **no significant impact on mandate implementation has been reported to date**. Missions have taken deliberate efforts to **readjust existing capacity** to sustain footprint in high-risk areas or focused on adapting the rotation plan and available

² Rotation data from the Movement Control section in the Department of Operational Support

³ As per December 2020, 80,574 uniformed personnel are deployed in peacekeeping, constituting more than 85 percent of the in total 94,484 personnel serving in UN peacekeeping.

capacity to ensure delivery on essential tasks. Examples include MINUSCA, which tailored its rotation plan to ensure sufficient uniformed capacity to support the December 2020 elections in the Central African Republic; UNIFIL, which has prioritized to retain a presence around the blue line; and MONUSCO and UNFICYP, where a reassessment of the security situation led to a redistribution of the strength of formed units to compensate for the non-availability of other units due to quarantine.

Other examples of efforts to minimize operational gaps include the implementation of a **staggered rotation schedule** across sectors to maintain crucial mission footprint in for example UNIFIL, MINUSCA and UNMISS. Rotating formed units in batches, as done with troops in UNMISS and formed police units in MONUSCO, has also been a way to minimize the impact of the quarantine requirements on operations⁴.

A number of missions utilize the quarantine period for virtual induction trainings and handover to ensure that incoming personnel can commence activities as soon as possible.

Some high-risk missions with a significant number of hotspots and limited flexibility to reposition troops, such as MINUSMA, have raised concerns about the impact of the reduced uniformed capacity and corresponding reduction in, for example, number of patrols on mandate delivery. In a high-risk mission as Somalia, UNSOM/S ensures the required security for personnel around the main base at Mogadishu International Airport (MIA) by **retaining excess guard personnel** and not rotating the outgoing Guard Unit until the incoming unit has completed the required 14-day quarantine.

A good practice observed amongst larger T/PCCs is the use of a **reserve capacity in for example** Egypt, India, Ghana and Rwanda, which has allowed these T/PCCs to replace infected personnel and minimize the impact on rotations, which has also played an important role in retaining capacity.

Integrated rotation planning

The partial resumption of rotations has been accompanied by **new coordination structures at UN Headquarters and at mission level to effectively cater for the need to align medical and operational considerations** and to enhance coordination with T/PCCs.

Most missions, including UNIFIL, MINUSMA, MINUSCA, MONUSCO, UNAMID, UNMISS and UNSOS/M, have established **integrated rotation working groups**, similar to the Troop and Police Rotation Sub-Working Group established at Headquarters, to align medical, logistical and operational considerations. This has been essential to ensure that uniformed components continue to deliver on their mandated tasks in a manner compatible with the quarantine, physical distancing and broader preventive measures, and to synchronize deployment plans with quarantine capacity and flight availability.

MINUSMA has further decentralized rotation planning to tailor these to the sub-regional context in Mali and set up **Integrated Regional Rotation Boards** bringing together mission support, medical, force and police personnel.

⁴ For example, SENFPU -1 and 2 in MONUSCO.

Challenges

- Since the resumption of rotations, **the planning horizon for strategic movements was reduced from 2-3 months to 1-month**, posing a significant challenge to coordination and preparedness efforts for T/PCCs, especially for T/PCCs deploying to multiple missions who need to synchronize pre-deployment quarantine with multiple stakeholders.

Recommendations

- The Secretariat, in close coordination with missions, should ensure **early engagement with T/PCCs on rotation plans** and circulate approved rotation plans three months in advance to ensure sufficient time to prepare troops and police for deployment in a COVID-19 environment.

Decentralization and broader measures to maximize quarantine capacity.

During the first three months of the resumption of rotations most missions quarantined uniformed personnel in facilities at mission headquarters. **UNAMID, MINUSMA and MINUSCA subsequently started to quarantine in sectors**, which has allowed these missions to increase quarantine capacity and speed up rotations. As a result of decentralization efforts, UNAMID was for example able to reduce its rotation schedule by two months.⁵

While decentralization of quarantine has been a good practice for some missions, this may not be replicable as a measure to enhance capacity across missions as quarantine locations are in some instances specified by the host government. The Government of South Sudan for example requires quarantine to be undertaken at the point of entry in the capital Juba, which leaves UNMISS with only the option of maximizing quarantine facilities within its two bases in Juba. Alternative means put in place in UNMISS to enhance quarantine capacity include enhanced coordination between police and military units, allowing for joint rotation and quarantining of military and police units from the same country.

Missions **rely mainly on pre-existing facilities** such as transit camps to comply with quarantine requirements. Some report that they have augmented the use of accommodation facilities for quarantine purpose by converting gyms and other recreational facilities to enhance quarantine space. UNMISS, MINUSCA and MONUSCO have enhanced quarantine capacity by allowing formed units to quarantine in own camps⁶; the construction of additional hard wall modules inside contingent camps; and the use of former contingent camps for quarantine purposes⁷.

⁵ Nevertheless, in November UNAMID announced a temporary halt in rotations as a result of the end of its mandate on 31 December 2020. UNIFIL and UNSOS/AMISOM have quarantined personnel in sectors/separate camps since the partial resumption of rotations.

⁶ In MINUSCA and UNMISS formed units deployed to Mission Headquarters are allowed to quarantine in their own camps. Separation from the remaining contingent for the duration of the quarantine period is ensured.

⁷ For example, in the case of a Mauritanian Formed Police Unit in MINUSCA (FPU-1) and use of the previous GABBAT camp in MINUSCA as quarantine facility.

Some T/PCCs report to have supplied additional **prefabricated facilities**, such as tents, for quarantine purposes and to adhere to physical distancing requirements⁸.

Finally, host nations can play a crucial role in addressing the challenges to in-mission quarantine capacity. The Republic of Cyprus for example made bespoke quarantine facilities temporarily available to UNFICYP, which allowed the mission to speed up rotations. UNMOGIP and UNTSO have relied on external facilities and quarantined its Individual Uniformed Personnel in designated UNDSS-approved guest houses and hotels.

Challenges

- **Quarantine capacity** remains a challenge for some missions, especially for those reliant on quarantine facilities at Mission Headquarters and/or pre-existing facilities, which in turn impacts the time required to complete a rotation.
- While uniformed personnel in several missions **quarantine in platoon sizes**, as recommended to contain the spread of COVID-19 in situations where positive cases are detected, some missions face difficulties in implementing this recommendation within the current quarantine capacity available in cases where personnel are required to quarantine at Mission Headquarters. The cost implications of undertaking quarantine in platoon sizes has also been raised as a challenge.
- **Frequent rotation of personnel** (every 6-9 months), which is done by some T/PCCs, also leads to an increase in the quarantine capacity required during COVID-19.

Recommendations

- DPO and DOS should continue to closely **monitor any challenges to quarantine capacity** and engage with relevant missions to explore potential solutions, including practices that have proven effective in other missions such as staggered rotations for formed units/contingents; joint military and police rotation and quarantine; use of prefabs and former contingent camps for quarantine.
- DPO should consider the **establishment of minimum deployment periods** of one year for uniformed personnel to minimize the volume of rotations and quarantine capacity required as a result of COVID-19.

⁸ For example, Cambodia

Movement of Personnel

T/PCC coordinated movement – Letter of Assist

Since the resumption of rotations there has been a moderate increase in the number of T/PCCs that have rotated under **Letter of Assist** (LOA). LOA requires the T/PCC to coordinate the rotation of personnel on a cost recovery basis. T/PCC feedback indicates that LOA has in some cases been favoured since the partial resumption of rotations as the use of national assets allows for more flexibility and is easier to coordinate and synchronize with, for example, pre-deployment quarantine requirements.

UN coordinated movement (Long Term Charter)

UN coordinated movement of personnel via the Long-Term Charter (LTC) modality remains the main mode of rotation of uniformed personnel. The partial resumption of rotations in July 2020 coincided with the start of a second LTC contract that led to significant cost savings and an increase in the number of aircraft available through the two providers (Ethiopian Airlines and Royal Jordanian Airlines).

The partial resumption of rotations has also seen an increase in “**reverse rotations**”, the practice whereby a unit is rotated out before a new unit arrives, partially as a way to ensure that the required quarantine capacity is available for incoming/outgoing uniformed personnel. This practice, when conducted under the Long Term Charter (LTC) modality, has shown significant cost savings for missions located in Africa and the Middle East as it reduces the number of empty legs on flights and afforded some financial relief to mission budgets.⁹ While reverse rotations has financial benefits, it should be noted that such an approach requires in-mission capacity and flexibility to absorb the temporary impact on operational capacity, which may not be present in high-risk missions with limited mobility and/or multiple hotspots.

Commercial Travel - rotations of Individual Uniformed Personnel

The UN coordinates flights for Individual Uniformed Personnel (IUP), including military staff officers, military observers and individual police officers. Travel is coordinated with missions and regional service centres, most notably the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe, which coordinates the travel planning for IUP deployment for all the large peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Challenges

- The establishment of **new LTC contracts on 1 July 2020** caused some delays attributed to the on-boarding of vendors.

⁹ If the airline first has to pick up incoming troops in, for example India, it will fly with an empty leg to New Delhi, which is not cost effective. Under a reverse rotation the airline will fly first to the mission area, which is a shorter flight, picks up the outgoing unit and flies it back to the country of origin. There, it will pick up the incoming unit and fly it to the mission, thereby reducing the number of empty flights.

- The first three months of the partial resumption of rotations saw a high number of last-minute changes to flight schedules due to COVID-19 outbreaks among T/PCC personnel and other operational factors. This has **implications for T/PCCs and incoming/outgoing uniformed personnel**, including extended quarantine periods, extended tours of duty, and financial costs due to for example the requirement to repeat COVID-19 PCR testing.
- Last-minute cancellations and changes to flight schedules also has had an **impact on the percentage of empty flight hours** and corresponding cost: whereas the contractual optimum rate for percentage of empty flight hours is set at 7% the average from July to October 2020 is 37%. As this rate provides the basis for calculation of the level of reimbursement under Letter of Assist, the empty LTC flights hours caused by COVID-19 will equally impact LOA expenses. While last-minute disruptions to LTC flight schedules is decreasing, the rate is expected to remain high for the foreseeable future.
- Global flight restrictions continue to impact commercial flights and as a consequence the deployment of IUPs. **Delays in IUP rotations**, and occasional gaps in deployment, has left missions temporarily without core capabilities such as military- and police planning; peacekeeping-intelligence and reporting; and uniformed representation in core integrated bodies as the Mission Support Centres, Joint Operations Centres and Joint Mission Analysis Centres.
- The frequent changes to commercial flights and **staggered arrivals of IUPs** have posed a challenge to the coordination of quarantine capacity (when IUPs quarantine in a central facility, e.g. at Mission Headquarters) and monitoring.
- Some T/PCCs and missions mentioned **lengthy travels for some IUPs** due to the policy of by default selecting the cheapest travel itinerary as a challenge to the welfare of personnel who already have undergone extensive quarantine periods prior to deployment.

Recommendations

- Missions and T/PCCs should continuously seek to **minimize changes to the agreed rotation schedules** to minimize empty flight hours and the corresponding financial impact. Continuous monitoring of empty flight hours is required as part of the overall assessment of the financial impact of COVID-19.
- DPO, DOS and missions to **explore options to better synchronize the travel arrangements for IUPs** and minimize staggered arrivals to allow them to quarantine in small groups.
- DPO and DOS to consider temporarily changing the practice of deploying IUP via the most economic route in favour of direct flights/ minimum transfers to minimize challenges posed by travel restrictions and different requirements introduced by transit countries. The cost of economical travel arrangements for the outgoing IUPs must be outweighed against the costs of their stay in the mission after completion of their Tour of Duty.

Welfare and personnel morale

Missions and T/PCCs highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on welfare and morale of uniformed personnel due to **quarantine periods, extended tours of duty** for uniformed personnel in missions and the overall increase in stress due to concerns about transmission and prolonged separation from family and friends. An extreme example was the more than 60-day quarantine period for a deploying Guard Unit from Nepal and an extended tour of duty of the sitting Guard Unit to 18 months.

The challenge to staff well-being has been amplified by the **suspension or reduction of in-mission welfare activities** to comply with physical distancing requirements and the use of welfare and recreation facilities (e.g. gyms, restaurants and social space in contingent camps) for quarantine purposes.

The provision of welfare for uniformed personnel is the responsibility of T/PCCs. **Good practices put in place by some T/PCCs** include increased access to welfare during the pre-deployment quarantine period in the home country, including access to IT equipment and internet to allow personnel to stay in contact with family and friends.

A number of **missions have enhanced welfare** for their personnel during COVID-19. UNIFIL, UNISFA, UNMISS have increased access to IT equipment and internet for uniformed personnel. This has the added benefit of allowing missions to run virtual induction trainings, including modules on prevention of COVID-19.

Other good practices introduced at mission level include making gym facilities available for incoming officers in quarantine; the establishment of integrated welfare committees with the representation of both civilian and uniformed personnel; engagement with contingent commanders on the importance of welfare for troops and police; and regular townhalls and broadcasts to ensure effective information sharing on COVID-19. The use of contingent camps for quarantine in some missions has also facilitated the provision of welfare and logistical support to the quarantined personnel through the use of their own COE and facilities.

A **dedicated welfare working group** with representatives from missions and the Secretariat was established under the Field Support Group for COVID-19 to enhance welfare support to both civilian and uniformed personnel. The working group facilitated an exchange of good practices among missions and issued guidance to missions on welfare and recreation in special situations. The enhanced focus on personnel wellbeing, including for uniformed personnel, during COVID-19 has by many interlocutors been highlighted as a good practice.

Recommendations

- Missions should ensure that information on COVID-19 in the host country, including support available to staff, is made accessible to uniformed personnel, to counter misinformation and anxiety.
- T/PCCs should make efforts to ensure that **formed units and IUPs are deployed with sufficient welfare** support during COVID-19, especially communication equipment for use during quarantine, and similar circumstances going forward.

- Missions should consider **augmenting welfare for uniformed personnel**, where possible, through enhanced access to sports equipment as well as IT equipment and internet. This could also serve the dual purpose of allowing virtual induction trainings, also to aid communication of COVID-19 guidance.
- Missions should continue to make every effort to **implement the ‘first in, first out’ principle** to minimize prolonged deployment periods.

4. EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 DURING ROTATIONS

Mandatory quarantine for uniformed personnel

To date a total of 1736 positive COVID-19 cases have been reported amongst uniformed personnel in field missions¹⁰. This represents a **2.1% infection rate amongst uniformed personnel**, which may indicate that the various precautions, including quarantine measures, put in place by missions have had a positive impact despite the challenges posed by congregate working and living conditions.

In line with the transitional measures, **uniformed personnel are required to quarantine for 14 days before departure from their country of origin, upon arrival in the mission and at the end of their tour of duty** in mission or after return to their country of origin to prevent the import and transmission of COVID-19 amongst personnel, host communities and in T/PCCs upon the return of personnel.

In comparison, the decision for quarantine requirements for civilian personnel, over and beyond the requirements put in place by national authorities, has been delegated to the most senior UN Official in-Country (the Designated Official). Measures vary across missions based on local risk assessments and testing capacity. The UN Medical Directors recommend a conservative approach for all personnel to shield staff and host communities to the extent possible.¹¹

All T/PCCs report strict compliance with the **14-day pre- and post-deployment** quarantine requirements, with some reporting significantly longer quarantine periods of up to 30 days.¹² To comply with host state or national requirements, or on their own initiative as a precautionary measure, most T/PCCs have supplemented quarantine with **COVID-19 PCR testing for personnel pre-and post-deployment**.¹³

¹⁰ DOS/DHMOSH data Feb 2021

¹¹ The appropriate recommendations of the United Nations Medical Directors can be found at the following link: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/coronavirus_unmdrmp.pdf.

¹² Guatemala and Kazakhstan for example follow a 30-day pre-deployment quarantine period. Some provinces in India equally require extensive quarantine periods upon return from travel (up to 21 days).

¹³ Several T/PCC report to undertake a minimum of two PCR tests ahead of deployment, typically before pre-deployment training and ahead of deployment. Some supplement with a third PCR test.

Some T/PCCs argue in favour of mandatory COVID-19 PCR testing pre-deployment and for outgoing personnel to minimize the risk of importing and exporting positive COVID-19 cases.

While the quarantine regime has been an effective method to detect and contain positive COVID-19 cases, missions and T/PCCs have raised questions and some concerns about the mandatory quarantine periods, especially for Individual Uniformed Personnel whose living, working and travel modalities in many cases resemble that of civilian personnel.

While a few missions have equally called for the review of the ***in-mission 14-day quarantine period for formed units***, noting the impact of the quarantine requirement on their operational capacity, most missions were more cautious about a possible review of the quarantine period for formed units, noting cases/outbreaks identified during quarantine and potential difficulties in containing outbreaks amongst contingents.

Weighing risks and benefits

The determination of the mandatory quarantine period is ultimately a matter of weighing on the one hand the risk of importing COVID-19 into our missions and the communities they serve, and on the other hand the need to maintain operational capacity by ensuring available “boots on the ground”. The current policy has sought to balance these two requirements and has so far been relatively successful.

Medical and testing considerations

The WHO recommendation for quarantine, after exposure to the virus, remains at 14 days, which is the at present maximum estimated incubation period. While WHO notes that the incubation period of the virus is on average 5 to 6 days, there remains a percentage of cases where it can be up to 14 days. Many host countries have reduced the quarantine requirement accordingly, most often combined with mandatory COVID-19 test certificates and COVID-19 testing upon arrival. The UN Designated Officials have in most of these countries reduced the quarantine period for civilian UN personnel accordingly.

Missions do not at present have the capacity required to test large numbers of people as testing machines supplied by the UN can currently only administer 1-2 tests per hour (not taking into account tests conducted in local health authorities’ labs or private facilities). Moreover, testing is, in line with COVID-19 guidance, prioritized for personnel exhibiting symptoms. A shortened quarantine period for uniformed personnel that relies on enhanced COVID-19 testing may therefore be a difficult exercise to undertake given the current testing equipment and capacity in missions. That said, testing capacity varies across missions with some, such as MINUSCA and UNSOS/M, shortening the quarantine period for civilians combined with enhanced testing¹⁴.

Individually deployed personnel vis-à-vis formed units

An important rationale behind the different policy approaches vis-à-vis civilian and uniformed personnel is that troops/contingents live and work in congregated settings in close quarters with each other where they have less ability to practice physical distancing. However, the living and working conditions of IUPs resemble in most cases those of civilian personnel: they live in private accommodation and many of them perform office tasks whereas troops/contingents live

¹⁴ MINUSCA has enhanced their testing capacity through an agreement with the private facility Institute Pasteur.

in barracks, patrol in groups, are in close contact with the civilian population, share vehicles, etc. However, IUPs do associate with members of formed units for operational, administrative and social reasons, which can pose a risk.

Considerations around pre-deployment quarantine

The UN currently requires a double 14-day quarantine period which is over and above the WHO recommendation. The main purpose of maintaining a strict pre-deployment quarantine period is to ensure, to the extent possible, that uniformed personnel arrive in the mission virus-free. To date, a total of nine T/PCCs consulted as part of the midterm review reported having positive COVID-19 cases present during the pre-deployment quarantine, leading to affected personnel being replaced or postponement of rotations. This indicated that to some extent the pre-deployment quarantine period is an effective measure for preventing the importation of cases to the mission.

Recommendations

- **The Secretariat to maintain the current pre-deployment, in-mission and post-deployment quarantine requirements for formed units/contingents**, in line with the current scientific estimation of maximum incubation periods and corresponding WHO guidance.
- **The Secretariat to consider an adjustment of the mandatory quarantine requirement for Individual Uniformed Personnel and delegate the decision to the Designated Official** in line with the approach for civilian personnel and UN Medical Directors guidance to missions.
- DPO, and DPPA where relevant, to **systematically monitor any impact of the quarantine requirements on mandate delivery**. Temporary exceptions to the quarantine requirements could be considered on a case-by-case basis should quarantine requirements consistently jeopardize critical tasks and other mitigating measures prove insufficient.

Monitoring and verification of preventive measures

During the initial period following the partial resumption of rotations some missions noted compliance issues including intermingling between incoming and outgoing troops. To support the implementation of preventive measures most missions put in place monitoring and verification systems. The light after-action review undertaken in August 2020 did, however, find “uneven rigor” in the monitoring and verification systems in place in missions and a need to further strengthen.

A requirement for missions to put in place **Outbreak Response Teams** and **Monitoring and Verification Teams** was communicated to all missions in September 2020. All missions have put in place such teams and participated in the training offered by UN Headquarters. Reporting

across all field missions has steadily increased. A new application to allow for more automated reporting has been rolled out in all missions with Monitoring and Verification Teams. A communication plan has also been disseminated to all missions to support in-mission awareness raising efforts and messaging around the importance of reporting COVID-19 symptoms.

Fewer missions report compliance challenges compared to the time of the after-action review in August, which could, in addition to the establishment of the Monitoring and Verification Teams, equally be attributed to the many **examples of good monitoring and verification practices initiated by missions**. Examples include the Rapid Response Team established in Somalia, where an assessment team visits incoming uniformed personnel upon arrival and the Monitoring and Verification Team established in UNIFIL, headed by the Deputy Force Commander, which undertakes visits to team sites before arrival of new troops, as well as inspects incoming personnel.

A number of missions have developed **mission specific guidance on COVID-19**, for example on quarantine and track and trace systems to support implementation of new requirements and ensure a coherent approach across field locations.

Challenges

- Examples of delays in reporting of COVID-19 symptoms have been observed. Perceived **stigma and unwillingness to come forward and report symptoms** has been mentioned as a possible cause.
- Some missions highlight the **multiple reporting requirements** related to COVID-19 and the burden it puts on already strained mission resources. Data is collected from different locations in the missions area on excel sheets and then manually uploaded by data focal points into the application for analysis and reporting.

Recommendations

- DPO and DOS should, building on mission initiatives and the communication plan circulated to missions, further engage with uniformed mission leadership and contingent commanders on the importance of timely reporting of symptoms and to **find solutions to broader challenges related to stigma**.
- DPO-DPPA to **review Monitoring and Verification Team reporting requirements** and, building on the app to allow for automated reporting recently promulgated across missions, explore options to further streamline and minimize the requirements.

5. PREPAREDNESS OF MILITARY AND POLICE PERSONNEL

COVID-19 guidance and training

In ensuring preparedness of uniformed personnel for deployment in a COVID-19 context, T/PCCs perceived information-sharing by the Secretariat as positive. In particular the public availability of all COVID-19 specific guidance at a central online repository; circulation of a COVID-19 Contingent Deployment Checklist; and the regular COVID-19 Member State updates were considered useful.

The Secretariat has issued more than 50 **COVID-19 specific guidance documents** related to outbreak management, response and preparedness to supplement overarching guidance issued by the WHO. The outbreak of COVID-19 has also been accompanied by a high number of **mission-specific guidance on COVID-19** to support implementation of new requirements and cater for context specific challenges. Some missions report that they use Movement Orders/ FRAGOs to communicate and reiterate quarantine and other preventative measures to T/PCCs. The Movement Orders are in many cases signed by the uniformed leadership in missions, including relevant contingent commanders, which missions note as a good practice to ensure accountability and buy-in.

COVID-19 requirements are also reflected in training efforts. All T/PCCs report that **pre-deployment training** for military and police personnel includes dedicated COVID-19 awareness modules, including the use of the virtual modules offered by WHO. The COVID-19 specific guidance made available by the Secretariat has recently been supplemented with the roll-out of an e-learning app '*UNCOVID-19*' to augment COVID-19 training efforts.

To aid the **mandatory UN-led pre-deployment readiness assessment of all police personnel** during COVID-19 the Police Division has promulgated supplementary guidance in the form of *Temporary Arrangements for the Assessment of IPOs and FPU for deployment to PKOs and SPMs*, to reflect the particular precautions necessitated by COVID-19. The guidance builds on hybrid, in person and virtual assessments visits by the Police Division to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Jordan, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda during COVID-19.

Challenges

- Some T/PCCs requested **more frequent updates on COVID-19 outbreaks**. Some also indicated that they would benefit from more **mission specific information** during the pre-deployment phase. Mission-specific guidance on COVID-19 is, unlike overarching UN guidance, not accessible to Member States.
- Some T/PCCs note that **variations in requirements across missions can be a challenge to incorporating mission-specific requirements into pre-deployment efforts**, for example if a T/PCC deploys troops and/or police to several missions.
- T/PCCs and missions note the **high number of COVID-19 guidance** documents and the occasional challenges to absorption capacity and a clear outline of the actions required.

- The reliance on virtual modules on COVID-19 may pose a challenge to effective preparedness of contingents without stable Wi-Fi access pre-deployment. Effective outreach and promulgation of COVID-19 guidance pre-deployment and in missions may equally be impacted by the absence of some materials and modules in languages beyond English.

Recommendations

- DPO and DOS should explore options to supplement detailed COVID-19 guidance with **short and concise “checklists” that outline the actions required by different actors; pocketbooks for uniformed personnel; and/or FAQs targeting T/PCCs**. Short guidance videos/webinars could be used for pre-deployment and in-mission trainings.
- DPO and DOS should explore options to supplement existing updates to T/PCCs with information on **COVID-19 cases and outbreaks in missions**, including location of COVID-19 cases. Existing platforms for engagement with Military-and Police Advisors could be used to share and explore T/PCC information requirements further. Options to make more mission specific information and guidance available should also be explored.
- DPO and DOS should ensure that priority **COVID-19 guidance is made available in French**.

Physical preparedness

In addition to the pre-deployment quarantine requirement, the **pre-deployment medical screening** for all incoming uniformed personnel is an important element of ensuring the physical preparedness of military and police personnel.

In addition, T/PCCs are responsible for ensuring that incoming uniformed personnel are fully equipped with adequate supplies of **personal protective equipment (PPE)** and other COVID-19 preventative materials as part of the soldier/police kits. The importance of PPE has been emphasized in the COVID-19 pre-deployment checklist for T/PCCs and in UN engagement with T/PCCs.

Challenges

- Some missions report **cases where T/PCCs do not bring sufficient PPE**. Missions report that they have been able to augment the PPE supplied by T/PCC on a **cost recovery** basis. The challenge with incoming personnel not bringing sufficient PPE does, however, seem to be diminishing. The checklist for inspection of Contingent Owned Equipment does not include the specific requirements for deployment during COVID-19, which some missions note as a challenge to monitoring and accountability.

- Some T/PCCs note the **cost implications of enhanced requirements for PPE** and other equipment brought about by COVID-19, coupled by the existing strain on resources due to requirements in the home country.
- Some interlocutors note the need for enhanced vigilance when it comes to the **pre-deployment medical screening** and reporting of underlying conditions of personnel in light of the existing strain on medical capacity in missions.

Recommendations

- **T/PCCs should continue to ensure that personnel are deployed with adequate supplies of face masks** and other COVID-19 preventative materials, including items for hand hygiene, thermometers, in line with the T/PCC deployment checklist for COVID-19.
- T/PCCs to ensure **strict compliance with established medical standards for deployment of uniformed personnel**, as outlined in the MS2 document on Medical Clearance for Deployment, to mitigate risk of any further strain on in-mission medical capacity. DPO and DOS should reiterate the requirements and importance of pre-deployment medical screenings in engagement with T/PCCs and continuously update and disseminate guidance on particular medical considerations in the context of COVID-19.
- DPO and DOS should explore options to **facilitate the exchange of good practices and lessons learned in COVID-19 preparedness efforts** across T/PCCs, e.g. as part of the regular engagement with Military- and Police Advisors at the Permanent Missions to the UN.
