



**Chief Executives Board
for Coordination**

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Dual Career & Staff Mobility

EXPATRIATE SPOUSE ASSOCIATIONS: A GLOBAL BRIEFING

Over 90% of the UN system Professional staff is expatriate¹. In light of conditions of service increasingly requiring rotation and other forms of geographic mobility, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) recognized that

“...the lack of facilities for the employment of expatriate spouses/partners... [is] a serious hindrance to the UN system’s ability to recruit and retain the highest qualified specialists for overseas assignments, particularly women.”²

The 2004 *UNDG Joint Guidance Note on the Employment of Expatriate Spouses* (Hereafter the Joint Guidance Note) established the United Nations Dual Career and Staff Mobility Programme (DC&SM), an inter-agency initiative of 15 international organizations with a common interest in facilitating expatriation of staff members and their families. As the main beneficiaries of such an initiative, the views and involvement of UN system spouses/partners is essential.

This short briefing is aimed at informing interested parties of the work and composition of Local Expatriate Spouse Associations (LESAs) and the Global Expatriate Spouse Association (GESA), democratic associations of spouses/partners of UN system staff members now established in over 40 duty stations around the world. DC&SM staff members are available at the CEB secretariat in Geneva to answer any questions and provide follow up, and can be contacted via unstaffmobility@unog.ch or by telephone or in person via our contact details on <http://www.unstaffmobility.org/contact>

The country level: Local Expatriate Spouse Associations (LESAs)

The Joint Guidance Note emphasizes strategies to assist spouse employment that are both local and tailor-made, with spouses/partners playing a central role. These criteria find their expression in the Local Expatriate Spouse Associations (LESAs), established in family duty stations around the world. Spouses/partners of staff members serving in a particular duty station are encouraged to join its LESA (or to form an association if one does not yet exist), and to elect chairpersons.

LESAs are local because they are duty-station specific, and solutions are tailor-made because they are proposed by the main beneficiaries of the initiative. Assistance can thus be based on the needs of the recipient, in the same manner as the substantive work of UNDG member organizations.

¹ Table 6, CEB Personnel Statistics 2008, <http://hr.unsystemceb.org/statistics>

² UNDG Joint Guidance Note on the Employment of Expatriate Spouses, 2004

The UNDG Joint Guidance Note envisages a large role for the Resident Coordinators and UN Country Team in helping to establish a LESA in their duty station³, as well as supporting the association and co-sponsoring activities with it. LESAs that are well-integrated into local UN system structures have enjoyed great success and tangible results. For more information please consult the case studies in Annex II to this document.

The global level: Global Expatriate Spouse Association (GESA)

While obstacles relating to spouse employment take effect at country level, some causes and solutions are global in nature or are common to a large number of duty stations. Examples might include the lack of employment opportunities in countries with high-levels of unemployment or a lack of information about the DC&SM programme to decision-makers and beneficiaries .

The UNDG Joint Guidance Note calls for the establishment of a Global Expatriate Spouse Association (GESA) to coordinate the activities of LESAs and to act as an interlocutor between the local associations and UN organizations. Dialogue between spouses/partners and the UN system thus takes place at both global and country levels.

Coordination support: the Dual Career and Staff Mobility secretariat

The network of LESAs and the GESA is supported by a small secretariat, whose two staff members focus on coordination support, spouse/partner work permits and HR policy issues. The secretariat also maintains a website and issues a newsletter called: *Two Work!* DC&SM secretariat support in starting up a LESA is available to all stakeholders in all countries.

Best practice: consistent, clearly defined support

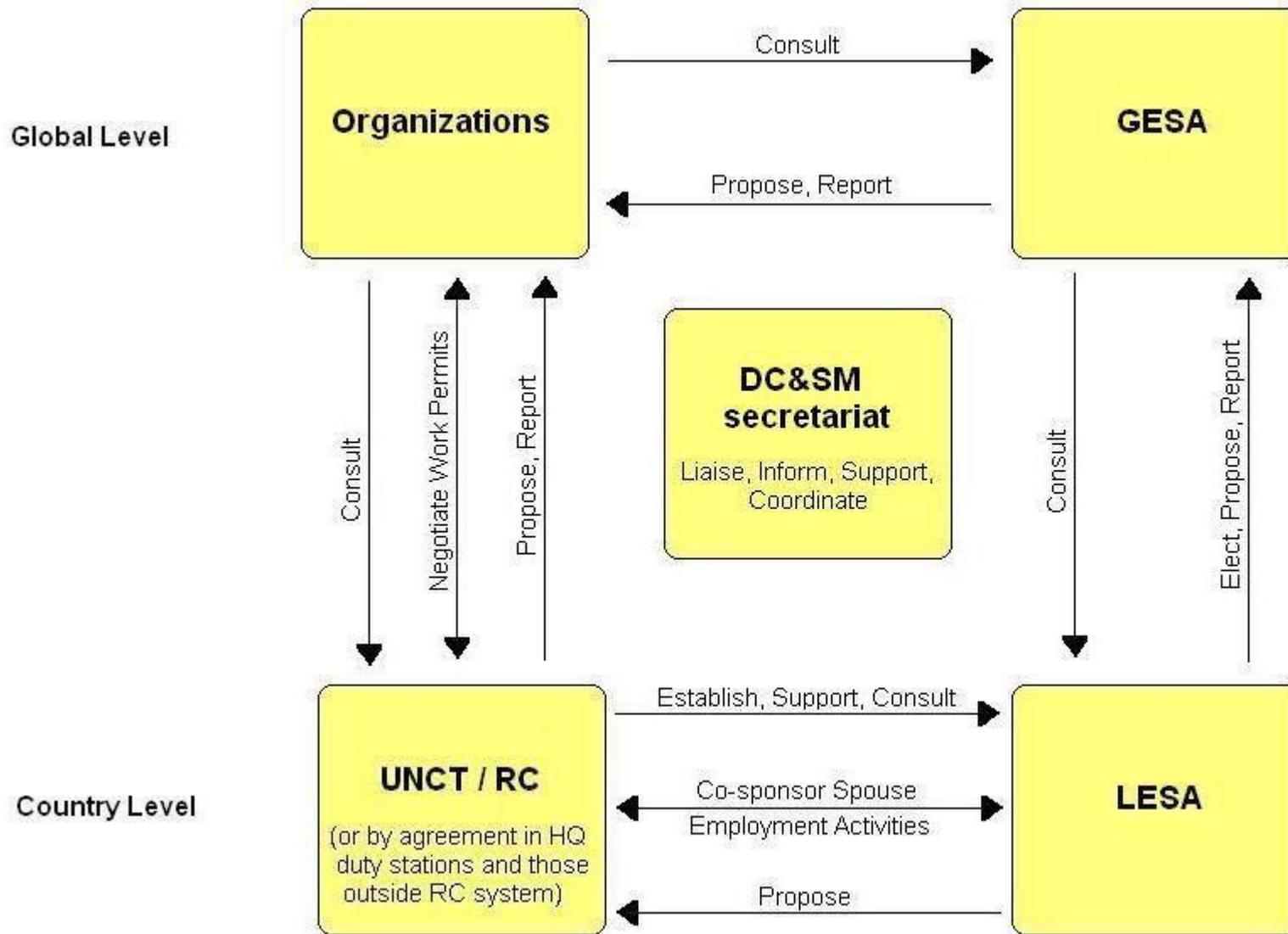
LESAs cannot stand alone in duty stations: they are voluntary organizations intimately involved with the work of UNDG member organizations in the duty station, and require a level of in-country interaction and administrative support. The UNDG Joint Guidance Note requires participating RCs and UNCTs to designate a Focal Point for liaison with the LESA. A diverse profile of staff have been designated as so-called “LESA Focal Points”, from local coordination support staff to Country Directors and Resident Representatives. In return, Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams can expect constructive feedback and proposals on issues of interest to UN system spouses/partners, support for families settling into a duty station so that the staff member can focus on the work at hand and an effective partner in making the duty station more amenable to staff members in dual career situations.

Consistent support –Characteristics of success for LESA Focal Points include a level of empathy with the subject, accountability to the RC and UNCT, and above all the ability to devote regular time to this area of coordination work. The DC&SM secretariat recommends that, where possible, support to LESAs be added to the LESA Focal Point’s duties and performance appraisal criteria.

Clearly defined support – The DC&SM secretariat has developed a global Terms of Reference (ToR), adding more detail to the UNDG Joint Guidance Note about the recommended responsibilities to be carried out by the secretariat, the LESA, and the LESA Focal Point. The global ToR are reproduced in annex III to this document. In many duty stations the ToR are supplemented by Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between the UNCT/RC and the LESA, helping to manage expectations and more clearly define roles in the context of the local situation.

³ In countries outside the RC system, an ad-hoc system of support to be provided by the heads of agencies present is proposed.

Annex I: Overview of Expatriate Spouse Association linkages



Annex II: Case Studies

Panama – change in employment law favouring UN system spouses/partners

The Panama LESA is an example of an association which defined access to work on the local economy as a major priority. With their initiative and the support of a sympathetic Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team, an accord was negotiated allowing UN system spouses/partners access to work permits without the usual restrictions on foreign labour such as a labour market test, or the availability of national or skilled quotas.

Honduras – LESA concerns lead to more inclusive security policies

Members of the Honduras LESA were concerned about domestic and personal security, and the lack of facilities for training on such issues. Effective advocacy led to the designation of “Security Month” at the duty station, with activities co-sponsored between the LESA and Department of Safety and Security (DSS) such as seminars on security in home and security for women, and preparations for the upcoming hurricane season.

Rome – Settling Service to help new arrivals to settle in

A new service to be pioneered by the Rome LESA aims to help newly-arrived families to settle into Rome, and to provide the LESA with a stable source of funding for greater activities. For a fee, the Rome LESS (Local Expatriate Settling Service) will greet new arrivals at the airport, provide assistance in renting suitable accommodation, and generally provide a “helping hand” during the first few weeks in Italy.

Peru – LESA provides a local pool of well-qualified consultants

The Focal Point of the Peru LESA, a coordination specialist in the RC’s office, encouraged qualified members of the LESA to apply for consultancies in the duty station and informed the LESA of upcoming opportunities. In the space of the first few months, LESA members secured work as photographers, conference organizers and evaluators.

Annex III: DC&SM Global Terms of Reference (ToR)

TERMS OF REFERENCE⁴ – LOCAL EXPATRIATE SPOUSE ASSOCIATION AND RESIDENT COORDINATOR FOCAL POINT

December 2009

Background

The UNDG Joint Guidance Note was produced to address the growing concern of the lack of facilities for the employment of UN expatriate spouses and partners. The spouse employment issue translates into a serious hindrance to the UN system's ability to recruit and retain the highest qualified specialists for assignments, especially women. Hence the programme focuses on permitting and encouraging the employment of UN expatriate spouses and partners and helping organisations take advantage of the pool of skills that is often readily available through well-qualified spouses and partners.

Modus Operandi

One of the central means for supporting and encouraging expatriate spouse employment focuses on the establishment of Local Expatriate Spouse Associations (LESA) in large numbers of duty stations, as the main conduit for the United Nations Dual Career & Staff Mobility programme (DC&SM) at country level. LESAs are representative bodies of spouses/partners of UN system personnel subject to geographic mobility. In addition to their representative functions, LESAs may choose to carry out any number of activities, such as promoting spouse employment, liaising and negotiating with local and international employment partners, holding monthly meetings of expatriate spouses to address employment matters, and other issues of interest to newly settling families, such as schooling, housing, social networks etc.

Liaison between the LESA and local UN structures takes place through the office of the Resident Coordinator, who appoints a member of staff to the role of LESA Focal Point or assumes this duty himself/herself. In countries outside the Resident Coordinator system, the appointment of a focal point is by agreement among the heads of organizations present.

Dialogue between LESAs and UN system management and between LESAs themselves is facilitated by the DC&SM secretariat.

Composition of LESAs

1. Membership shall be automatic to all those who meet the membership criteria. No compulsory fees may be instituted for membership, although voluntary donations may be sought.
2. Membership of a LESA shall be open to all spouses/partners of UN system personnel who are subject to geographical mobility.
3. A LESA shall be representative of its full members. Full members shall vote on an annual basis to elect representatives according to procedures decided by full members.
4. LESAs may choose to create any number of classes of associate membership, such as for interested staff members or for spouses/partners of UN system personnel not subject to

⁴ Based on the UNDG Joint Guidance Note on the Employment of Expatriate Spouses (UNDG, July 2004).

geographical mobility. The latter is particularly encouraged as an invaluable source of local knowledge and continuity.

5. In order to legitimately represent the interests of the duty station's spouses/partners of UN system personnel subject to geographical mobility, only full members may vote and stand for positions which have as their function the representation of full members.

Terms of Reference – LESA

These terms of reference reflect the activities to be undertaken by LESAs as listed in the UNDG Joint Guidance Note. LESAs are free to set up any management system they deem useful to carry out these activities and responsibilities, such as Chair and Co-Chair, Board, committees etc. However, the official election of at least one lead person is required in order to formally represent the views and opinions of the spouses/partners of UN system personnel subject to geographical mobility.

LESAs are expected and requested

1. To represent the views and interests of expatriate spouses/partners of staff members
2. To liaise with the LESA Focal Point, with the DC&SM programme secretariat and with local UN structures, and attend relevant meetings.
3. To call, organise, manage and minute regular (monthly) LESA meetings
4. To develop and coordinate an annual plan of activities based on local priorities
5. To transmit (in conjunction with the LESA Focal Point) to the programme secretariat a local annual report, including reports on the annual plan of activities, experiences, constraints and successes, suggestions of adjustments to programme strategies and statistics on success in securing employment for expatriate spouses/partners of staff members in the professional category
6. To ensure sound appropriate hand-over procedures to Co-Chairpersons or new LESA Chairpersons

Suggested activities that LESAs may wish to consider include

- a) To liaise and negotiate (in conjunction with the LESA Focal Point) with the other international actors at the duty station such as NGOs, the development community and the diplomatic community and to co-sponsor programmes and activities in support of expatriate spouse employment and career pursuits.
- b) To organise and manage the development of a 'welcome package', be it adapted from the global welcome package (available on the website) or entirely developed locally.
- c) To work with the programme secretariat to research and provide country briefing information, including employment opportunities, self-employment possibilities, means to find local employment, housing, schooling, social activities etc.
- d) To generally assist newly-arrived expatriate families with settling into their new duty station.
- e) To organize support through the local community and develop local opportunities that enhance the 'portable skills' of UN spouses and help them find work.

Terms of Reference – LESA Focal Point

The LESA Focal Point is the staff member tasked with ensuring the establishment and support of the LESA in each duty station. These terms of reference should form part of the staff member's regular duties. The LESA Focal Point role is assigned by the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) or in countries outside the RC system by agreement among the heads of the agencies present.

The LESA Focal Point is expected and requested

1. To facilitate the establishment and support the functioning of LESAs, including wherever possible the allocation of available office space and equipment to the LESA.
2. To assume the lead coordinating role amongst local UN structures in promoting the objectives of the LESA
3. To liaise with the LESA, the DC&SM programme secretariat and local UN structures, and attend relevant meetings.
4. To actively promote the employment of spouses/partners of UN system personnel in the duty station
5. To actively promote and participate (in conjunction with the programme secretariat) in the negotiation of formal agreements (such as host-agreements, bi-lateral agreements or unilateral laws) to facilitate the issuance of temporary work permits to UN expatriate spouses/partners.
6. To liaise and negotiate with the other international actors at the duty station such as NGOs, the development community and the diplomatic community and to co-sponsor programmes and activities in support of expatriate spouse employment and career pursuits. The local LESA shall at all times be invited to take part in such liaison and negotiation, and the LESA Focal Point shall consider any initiatives for such liaison and negotiation proposed by the LESA.
7. To transmit (in conjunction with the LESA Chairperson) to the programme secretariat a local annual report, including reports on the annual activities, experiences, constraints and successes, suggestions of adjustments to programme strategies and statistics on success in securing employment for expatriate spouses/partners.

Terms of Reference – DC&SM Programme Secretariat

The programme secretariat facilitates the work of the LESAs and of the LESA Focal Points, maintains the programme global website and aims to support the interests and provide solutions to the concerns of LESA members. It also seeks to promote participation in the programme among a broad range of organisations within and outside the UN system and works to keep the issues of staff mobility and spouse employment on the agenda of relevant bodies such as the HR Network and the High Level Committee on Management.

The DC&SM Programme Secretariat is expected and requested

1. To facilitate, via the creation of a Global Expatriate Spouse Association (GESA), dialogue between the LESA and participating agencies of the programme and between LESAs themselves
2. To liaise with the LESA through its representatives, the LESA Focal Points, the participating organisations and the global UN structures and facilitate (via videoconference, teleconference or in person) relevant meetings.
3. To facilitate access for the LESA and the LESA Focal Point to the global programme website, especially in the timely delivery of information to members
4. To work with each LESA to research and provide country briefing information, including employment opportunities, self-employment possibilities, means to find local employment, housing, schooling, social activities etc.
5. To actively promote and participate (in conjunction with the LESA Focal Point) in the negotiation of formal agreements (such as host-agreements, bi-lateral agreements or unilateral laws) to facilitate the issuance of temporary work permits to UN expatriate spouses/partners.

6. To produce a global programme annual report, including global information on governance, effectiveness, coverage and funding as well as reports on annual activities, experiences, constraints and successes, suggestions of adjustments to programme strategies, statistics on LESA membership and success in securing employment for expatriate spouses/partners.