

Getting the Most out of Civilian Crisis Management Secondments – Findings and Recommendations for Experts and their Home Agencies

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1 Introduction

The strategies and guidelines regarding Finland's crisis management policy outline that Finland pursues maintaining an adequately large, diverse and competent pool of experts as well as raising the national contribution to crisis management operations, in order to contribute towards more effective crisis management and sustainable peace. The political ambition to implement these national objectives and raise

the number of experts is supported through a range of strategic guidelines and administrative recommendations among various administrative branches. For instance, the legislative act on the Participation of Civilians in Crisis Management¹ states that public servants have a right to receive unpaid leave or exemption for secondments as well as training that prepares them for deployment.

¹ The full text of the Act on the Participation of Civilians in Crisis Management is available in the Finnish judicial data bank (FINLEX): www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2004/20041287

To support the objectives of Finnish crisis management policies in terms of maintaining and increasing the number of seconded experts, it is beneficial to generate an environment where both the expert and the home agency benefit from the civilian crisis management deployment by gaining new competencies and experience during the missions. When correctly utilised, the experts' new competencies and experiences can strengthen their home agencies' functions as well as developing national preparedness and capacities. Achieving mutually beneficial circumstances requires flexible personnel policies and improved detachment of personnel deploying for civilian crisis management missions. The personnel policy should generate prerequisites for supporting experts and their competency development both abroad and back home.

This Policy Brief is based on CMC's latest report,² which examines seconded experts' perceptions and experiences of how their home agencies view civilian crisis management secondments, and whether they have been able to make use of knowledge gained during their secondment. The report draws from experiences of experts representing various administrative branches and highlights factors which either encourage or discourage the possibility of pursuing civilian crisis

management deployments. It indicates that the relationship between experts and their home agencies could be improved in several ways, which the report highlights through a set of recommendations.

Key recommendations

- Improving the organisational culture to perceive civilian crisis management more positively through training, lectures and internal communication platforms.
- Enhancing personnel planning and discussion of experts' potential interest in applying for civilian crisis management positions.
- Streamlining communication and repatriation practices through regular communication during the secondments and comprehensive re-introductions to duties back home.
- Recognising the competencies and improving the documentation of new expertise as well as generating an environment where it is beneficial to share information regarding new competencies and experience.

² The full version of the report is available on CMC's website: <https://www.cmcfinland.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Kokoava-selvitys-eri-hallinnonaloilta.pdf> (in Finnish only).

How was the Report compiled?

The full report is based on three separate studies conducted in 2021 and 2022. The studies map the experiences of experts from the administrative branches of the Ministry of Justice, Police, Finnish Border Guard, Finnish Immigration Service and Customs regarding their home agencies' attitudes toward civilian crisis management deployments and the effects of secondments on career development as well as utilising new competencies gained during secondments. The data for the report was assembled through questionnaires sent to the experts as well as personal interviews held with smaller clusters of experts. Two of the studies were conducted by CMC Finland and one is a thesis conducted at the Police University College in collaboration with CMC Finland.

This Policy Brief is an abstract from the findings and recommendations in the comprehensive report conducted in Finnish. The full version of the report is available on CMC's website: <https://www.cmcfinland.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Kokoava-selvitys-eri-hallinnaloilta.pdf>

2 Findings

2.1 Motives and Restrictions on Applying for Civilian Crisis Management Duties

The report elucidates that the motivations of experts for applying for civilian crisis management deployments are driven by both internal and personal factors, such as a desire to develop their own expertise, the relevance of the duties as well as a desire to work in new operational environments and cultures. However, the endorsement of line managers or home agencies for applying for deployments was regarded as the least motivational factor. The report also indicates that the home agencies generally do not encourage or support personnel in applying for deployments and the perception of the home agencies towards deployments is rather passive. For example, over 80 % of the respondents felt that their home agencies do not encourage personnel to apply for civilian crisis management duties (image 1). In addition, some of the experts felt that their home agencies perceive the secondments unfavourably, which is a central factor in why the experts did not see themselves applying for redeployments.

“My home agency endorses and supports applying for civilian crisis management secondments.”

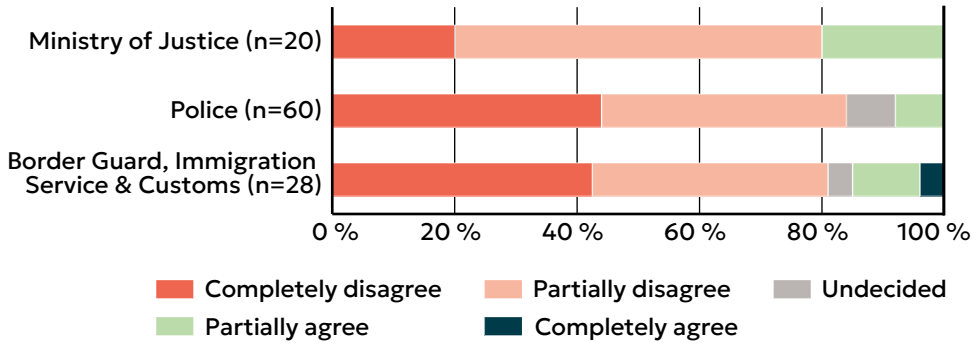


Image 1: *Endorsement and support for international duties by home agencies*

2.2 Communication and Returning Practices

Previous studies regarding the repatriation of experts distinctly indicate that both the home agency and the expert benefit from a comprehensive reorientation and support of the expert’s reintegration into their tasks. Thus, the expert’s repatriation process should be planned thoroughly before their return from their mission. However, communication practices between the expert and home agency during the deployments seem to be relatively inconsistent and occasional. For instance, only 30–45 % of the experts partaking in the studies had discussed about duties after deployment with their employer, and only 10–30 % perceived that the employers gave them relevant information on the possible changes

that had occurred in their field during the deployments.

The experts also saw room for improvement in the repatriation practices of the background organisations, especially in terms of deliberateness and systematicity. For example, 61 % of the respondents from the Ministry of Justice and almost half of the respondents from the Border Guard, Immigration Service and Customs perceived that the home agencies did not organise their repatriation comprehensively (image 2). In addition, there was a strong consensus among the Police experts that the practices of the reorientation processes by the background organisations after deployment are crucial but yet inadequate in their current state.

How was the return to the background organisation organised after repatriation from a civilian crisis management mission?

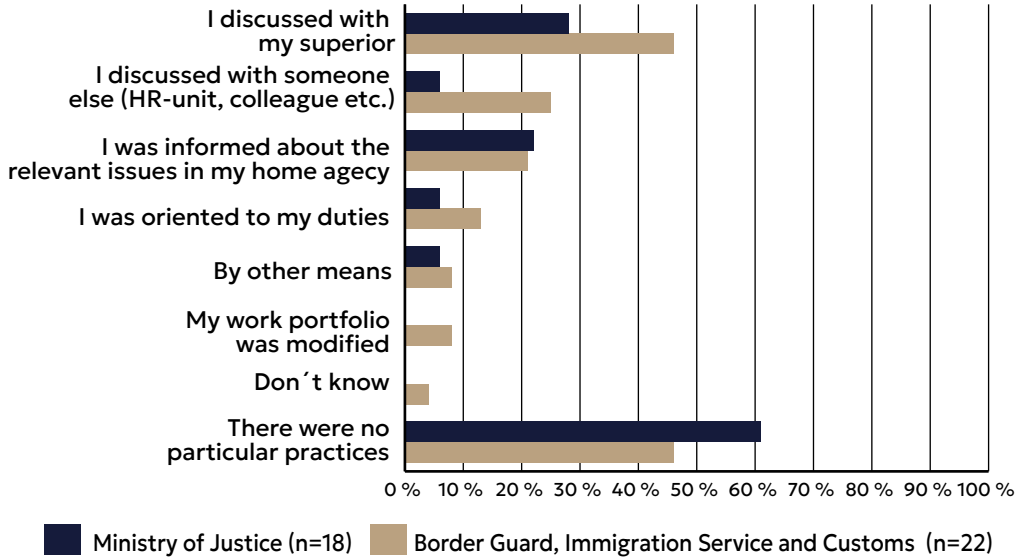


Image 2: Practices concerning the return to the background organisation

2.3 Career Development and New Competencies After the Deployment

The experts partaking in the studies assessed that their competencies improved comprehensively and versatilely during their deployments on civilian crisis management missions. In particular, so-called generic capabilities and skills, such as the ability to work under challenging conditions, stress tolerance and negotiating and problem-solving skills were seen to have improved

significantly. Alongside these generic skills, the experts viewed that their substantive specific competencies in their own field have enhanced. A clear majority of the experts saw that the civilian crisis management experience and their new competencies would benefit them in their duties back at their home agency and have been active in utilising them (images 3 & 4).

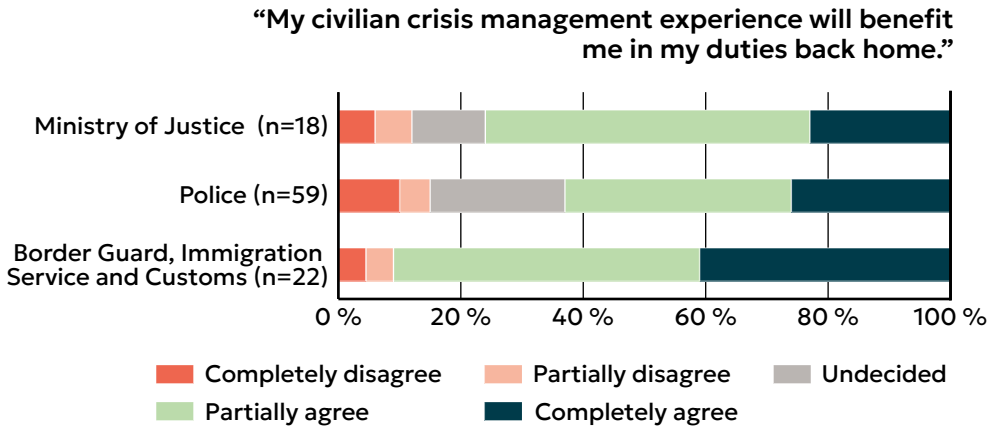


Image 3: *The benefit of “civilian crisis management experience in duties back home*

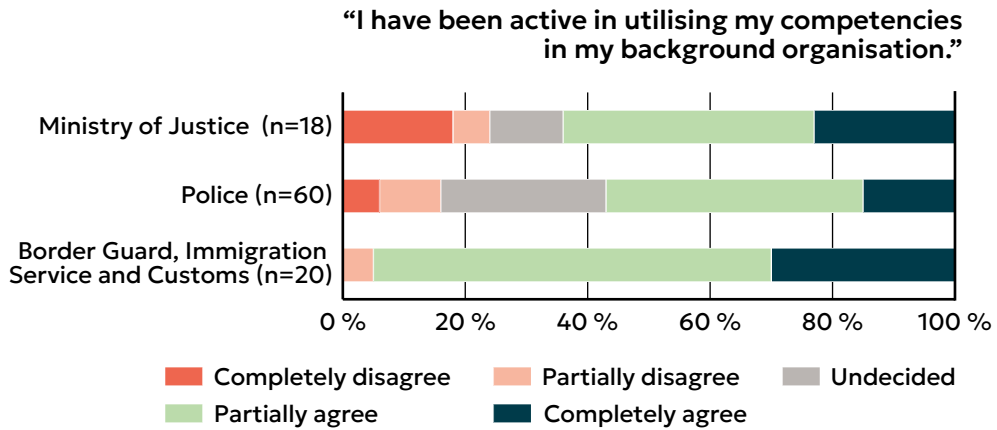


Image 4: *Experts’ own activity in utilising their new competencies in their home agencies*

Accumulated experience from the field, combined with new and improved competencies and the willingness to utilise them in their home agencies, have a clear link to a desire to advance along the domestic career path. For instance, 91 % of the respondents working in the Border

Guard, the Finnish Immigration Service and Customs perceived that their deployment abroad increased their aspirations to advance in their personal career paths (image 5). However, utilising the new expertise and having the possibilities for career development can depend

on rather minor factors, such as the attitudes of line managers towards crisis management experience, as negative views can possibly have

detrimental effects on utilising the new experience as well as applying for redeployment.

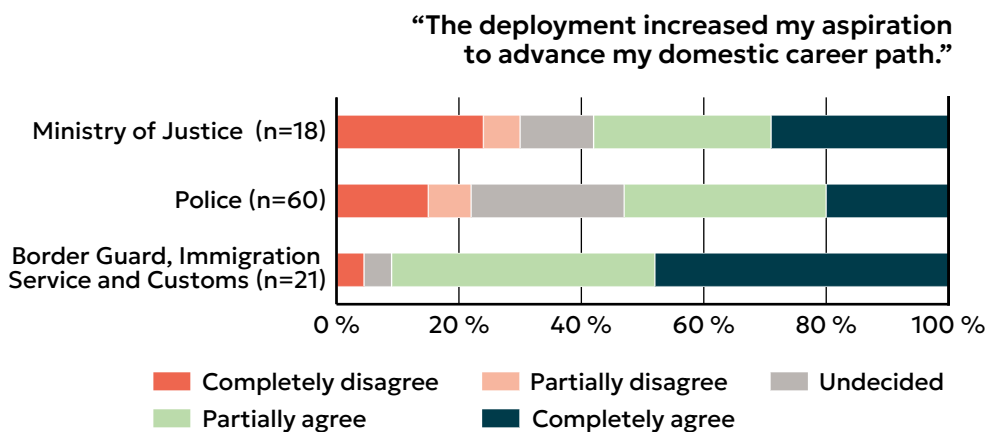


Image 5: *The deployment increased my aspiration to advance my domestic career path*

2.4 The Utilisation of Competencies in Home Agencies

The perceptions of line managers and home agencies generally play a pivotal role when it comes to constructing the circumstances where the new competencies of the experts can be fully implemented. However, the findings point out that despite the increased and developed competencies and the desire to utilise them, a major portion of the experts have experienced their return and their prospects for career development as being rather challenging after their deployment. In many cases, neither the line manager or the home

agency have generally indicated an active interest in the experience and competencies developed during the secondments, and there are no comprehensive practices and processes to utilise the competencies of experts in the home agencies. For example, 20 % of the respondents working in the Border Guard, Immigration and Customs, and only 5 % working in the Police, felt that their line manager has shown interest in their experience and competencies gained during their secondments (image 6).

“My line manager has shown interest in my new experience and competencies gained in civilian crisis management duties.”

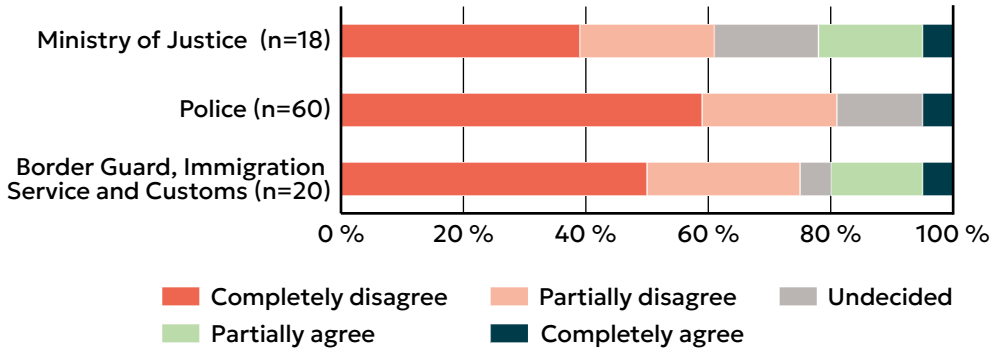


Image 6: *The interest of line managers in new experience and competencies gained in civilian crisis management duties*

The results concerning the interest of the home agency generally comply with the perceptions of the line managers, since the studies indicate a partial lack of comprehensive planning for the utilisation of secondments in the home agencies. For example, the majority of the experts from all of the branches perceive that the background organisation do not plan what kinds of civilian crisis management positions would benefit the organisation (image 7).

Overall, if the line manager or home agency generally does not show interest in the new experience and competencies, it is highly likely that the utilisation of the new competencies will be more challenging. This inevitably leads to a loss of valuable experience and lowers the motivation of experts returning to domestic duties.

“The background organisation plans what kind of international missions that experts participate in would benefit the organisation.”

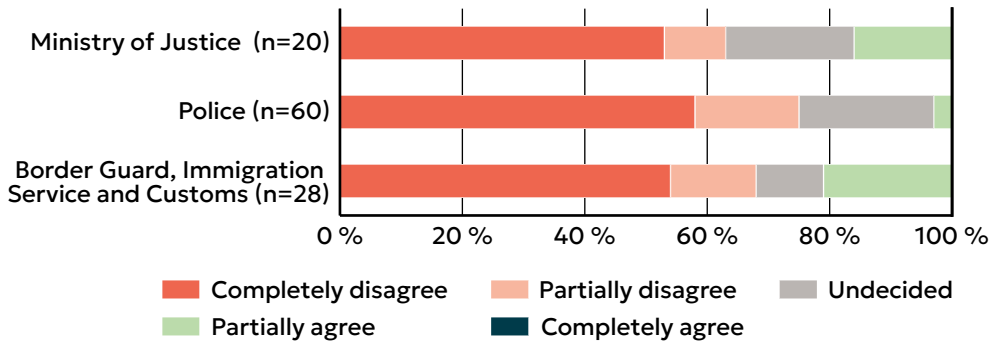


Image 7: *The background organisation plans that their employees’ participation in certain international positions would benefit the organisation*

3 Action Proposals

The perceptions and experiences vary from expert to expert, but despite that, a concerning narrative and challenges are recognisable in terms of the lack of utilising new competencies gained during secondments. Thus, in the current state, both the

experts and the home agencies are losing potential. Improvements in organisational culture, communication and repatriation practices as well as the more systematic documentation of new competencies are needed to get the most out of secondments.

3.1 Improving the Organisational Culture Towards Civilian Crisis Management

First, the organisational culture could be improved and modified for a more positive attitude towards civilian crisis management secondments by raising awareness of civilian crisis management and its benefits for

both experts and home agencies. This could be enhanced through sharing information on internal communication platforms and in training, as well as by improving communications generally. Information directed

towards line managers regarding raising awareness of the issues and benefits of civilian crisis management would be particularly desirable. The minimum precondition should be

that general attitude in the home agencies towards experts returning from secondments is not negative and their new competencies are perceived in a favourable light.

3.2 Streamlining Communication and Repatriation Practices, and Improving Personnel Planning

Streamlining and improving the planning of communications and repatriation practices could prevent the possible challenges the experts face during their repatriation processes and adjusting back to their domestic duties. This could be implemented through an open conversation about the wishes and objectives of the deployment between the expert and the line manager, regular communication during the secondment and a comprehensive re-introduction to the duties back home. In practice, these proposals would involve informing

the experts returning to their domestic duties of possible changes in the organisation and organising re-introduction courses for them. In addition, to improve the foreseeability of experts' desire to deploy for civilian crisis management missions and the effects of this on the home agency, it could be recommended that potential deployments and the desire to deploy on missions are included in performance evaluation discussions between the expert and their line manager.

3.3 Documenting and Mapping Out New Competencies More Systematically

In its current state, the projection of new expertise and experience is mainly in the hands of the experts themselves. This, combined with the fact that putting generic competencies into words can be rather challenging, means it is not a surprise that the experts face difficulties in bringing up their competencies effectively. Moreover, in some cases, the returning experts might

possess time-sensitive information and know-how for operational use which should be utilised effectively. Therefore, it is crucial to harvest and document the expertise through evaluation discussions between the expert and their line manager as well as through ongoing contact with the expert during their deployment. In addition, the home agencies should generally construct an environment

where it is accommodating and beneficial for the experts to share information regarding their expertise and competencies.

The report and its findings are based on answers from experts working in the branches of administration referred to in the beginning, but it is highly likely that experts from other fields and their background organisations also face similar challenges and development opportunities. Thus, the proposals suggested in the report could contribute to policies aimed at increasing the number of experts in civilian crisis management operations as well as the operationalisation of the strategic policies of the administrative sectors at the organisational level.

Research and development at CMC Finland

Research and development is one of the statutory tasks of CMC Finland. It aims to support the training, recruitment and duty of care functions of the CMC, as well as partaking in discussions about current issues related to civilian crisis management. The research and development activities carried out at CMC Finland are practical, and research projects are often carried out as part of larger consortia. We analyse, for example, the recruitment and training path of experts seconded by the CMC and gather feedback to develop the CMC's core functions. The R&D unit also maintains situational awareness and partakes in the national implementation in crosscutting themes, such as sustainable development as well as the Youth, Peace and Security and Women, Peace and Security Agendas.

