

The impact of working in a border control environment

Protection Training Manual for European Border and Entry Officials

Session 4

Debriefing Part II

The complexity of working in border control areas

- Psychological strain of people working with victims of trauma and “persons in need”: typical for humanitarian workers
- Additional constraints in the case of border guards:
 - Overwhelming task of stemming irregular migration flows into Europe
 - Dealing with fundamental rights at the same time as having to “seal” the borders
 - Often under fire by NGOs, media or political parties
 - Not typical policing:
 - border areas are unpredictable,
 - unresourced (particularly arrival “hot spots”),
 - lack of clear standard operating procedures to apply international law.

The psychological reactions

1. Compensate for challenges by working harder, faster and better

2. Tiredness and burn-out:

- Cannot cope with level of work: take distance from distressed areas or persons
- Communication diminishes

3. Transfer of problem to “the other”:

- To the institution
- To the migrants / asylum-seekers

4. Protecting the sense of “self”:

- “Everything is going fine”
- Lack of constructive self-criticism that enables improvement.

Striving towards a healthy approach:

- See individual actions as part of a coherent chain of actions: maintain links with national referral institutions, UNHCR, NGOs, etc
- Limit focus of attention to the reality right in front of you: the needs of THAT individual (not of migration control nor of all arriving individuals)
- Other practical measures:
 - Rotation from “hot spot” to more stable ones;
 - Ongoing psychological support and peer-support;
 - Regular annual leave.