

What is Home Assignment anyway?

Surprisingly, a lot of independent mission workers have not come across this term which is well-known in the wider missions community. Home Assignment (HA) is time spent in your home culture away from your field. It used to be known as furlough, but that got to sound too much like an extended holiday, so the term Home Assignment was coined to convey the reality that mission partners back in their sending country are still expected to work. In fact sometimes they seem to work so hard that they go back to the field for a rest.

The idea developed many years ago when people needed occasionally to travel back to their home country for the sake of their health, and to communicate in person with their sending organisation and supporters. The older sending organisations often still preserve the older pattern of four or five years in the field followed by a year in the home country, but since international transport has become ever more cheap and convenient, this is breaking down into smaller periods such as 6 months HA after two years, or even six weeks every year. This pattern is also used in the oil industry (three weeks on a rig followed by a week off) or the financial services sector (two months in Dubai followed by two weeks furlough), but the army's use of time on active service followed by time back at base is more analogous to the missions community.

There are various uses for HA:

- Academic – getting children back into their national education system
- Ecclesiastic – refreshing relationships with church and supporters
- Financial – maintaining rights to state benefits and raising new support
- Medical – getting physical and psychological check ups
- Missional – promoting missions at churches and conferences
- Personal – catching up with family and friends
- Professional – getting new training or brushing up on skills
- Spiritual – taking time out from day to day work to review a vocation and listen to God

It is generally agreed that HA is crucial to maintaining a healthy level of support. People who work abroad for 20 or 30 years without returning to their sending country can lose touch with supporters and gradually find themselves isolated. While they may think this doesn't matter much at first, they eventually run out of prayer and finance, and it is particularly hard for them when they 'retire' and have to return to what has become for them a foreign country where they have no friends.

If the sending agency does not specify how long HA should last, it is a matter of personal preference. Many mission workers can't wait to get back to their field, but if they don't spend a reasonable amount of time on HA they can be very rushed getting everything done. A longer time can also give more opportunity for prayer, and time to uncover any personal issues which have developed while away which could easily be obscured by being busy. **Syzygy** recommends that you take at least three months, and preferably six months to a year, depending on your circumstances.