

Policy Guidance - All duty stations

Alternate working arrangements (AWA) and Flexible working arrangements (FWA) in the context of COVID-19

Version 2 – 12 October 2020

Alternate working arrangements

1. Alternate working arrangements are implemented **at the request of the Organization** and are therefore different from flexible working arrangements. Although both may involve working from an alternate location within or outside the duty station, alternate working arrangements are not considered flexible working arrangements. The authority to implement alternate working arrangements rests with the Secretary-General for UNHQ entities and with the heads of entities for entities outside of UNHQ, based on recommendation of the Designated Official for Security.
2. In an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Secretary-General and respective heads of entities in duty stations around the world have decided in the past months to restrict physical access to UN premises while keeping offices open virtually. In all entities at all duty stations where such decisions have been made, UN personnel are required to work remotely, unless their physical presence on the premises is necessary to carry out essential work. This is neither optional nor a voluntary telecommuting arrangement between managers and personnel but a mandatory requirement by the Organization. All personnel must comply.
3. Concretely, it means that while offices are physically closed or access is restricted to a limited number of authorized personnel in the context of business continuity in accordance with a phased return to the workplace, personnel whose on-site presence is not required are requested to discharge their functions from an alternate location, generally their residence at the duty station, as an alternate working arrangement.
4. During AWA, personnel may be authorized by their managers to discharge their functions away from the duty station, for as long as their presence at the duty station or on UN premises is not required. AWA outside the duty station should,

normally not to exceed six months. Heads of entities may however decide, based on specific conditions at the duty station¹ that AWA outside the duty station should continue beyond six months. Decisions regarding suspension or continuation of AWA outside the duty station should apply to all Secretariat entities present at the duty station and be taken in coordination with all entities concerned. UN agencies, funds and programmes present at the duty station should also be consulted with a view to harmonize the arrangements applicable to personnel across the organizations of the UN common system.

5. In the rare cases where personnel would be requested to work remotely from a specific alternate location, travel to that location will be payable. DSA will also be payable, except when working remotely from the place of home leave. If personnel choose to travel away from the duty station (i.e. they have not been required to leave the duty station), no DSA or travel will be payable but eligible personnel may be authorized to use their entitlement to home leave, family visit or reverse education grant travel.
6. Staff members utilizing their home leave or family visit entitlement to travel away from the duty station shall be required to use a minimum of five days of annual leave during their stay in the place of home leave or family visit travel. Full flexibility as to how and when the annual days are taken will be exercised, taking into consideration personnel needs and exigencies of service. Therefore, the five days of annual leave can be taken at any time during the stay in the place of home leave/family visit and do not have to be taken consecutively and can be taken in either half-day or full day increments.
7. In addition, Organization-paid travel to the place of residence/home leave or exceptionally to another authorized location requested by the staff member may also be utilized when a qualifying duty station has decided to implement scenario 1 (b) of the Human Resources Network's Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations guidance note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020 and the related [UN Secretariat directive](#) (27 June 2020). Under scenario 1 (b), when physically present at the duty station, personnel may avail of flexible working arrangements subject to their manager's agreement; and when outside the duty station, they will be requested to work under alternate working arrangements, unless they avail of leave. Under this scenario, no DSA is payable.

¹ Specific conditions at the duty station include but are not limited to airport not being fully operational/limited incoming flights, restrictions in duty station imposed by host country that would prevent staff from going in office such as lockdown, continuance of footprint reduction, etc.

8. Personnel who are working remotely outside of their duty station under alternate working arrangements need to:
 - a) update their security clearance profiles whether they arrived at the location on a personal or official travel. This will ensure that staff remain informed of security updates and supported by local security arrangements;
 - b) be aware of the fact that enrolment in medical insurance plans are made based on their official duty station so medical expenses, doctor's visits and hospitalization in a different location, particularly outside the country of the duty station might result in out-of-pocket medical expenses;
 - c) understand that the payment of danger pay, where applicable, is not payable for the period that the personnel work remotely from outside their official duty station in accordance with the conditions described in [Annex II of the 2011 ICSC Annual Report A/66/30](#);
 - d) be aware that the accrual of qualifying service toward rest and recuperation remains governed by the conditions established in section 3 of ST/AI/2018/10 on rest and recuperation;
 - e) know that at this time, in the context of COVID-19, other entitlements will continue to be paid in relation to the official duty station, including hardship and non-family allowances, including for exceptional situations if it is decided that AWA outside the duty station can continue for more than 6 months.
9. In light of the schools and day care closures or adjustments to normal operations (on-line classes, reduced on-site presence) and other disruptions to family support services, including elder care, the requirement regarding core working hours' periods may remain lifted as per decision by the official with delegated authority.
10. UN personnel who are asked to physically return to the workplace one or more days per week to execute functions that require their on-site presence and based on exigencies of service, during a phased return to the office will also continue to work on alternate working arrangements on the days on which their presence on-site is not required. Rotation and shifts may be introduced to limit the number of UN personnel on site at any given time and allow physical distancing as part of alternate working arrangements. No additional compensation should apply.

11. Alternate working arrangements should remain in effect until daily occupancy limits are lifted. The official with delegated authority may however decide to fully or partially suspend AWA outside the duty station based on local conditions at the duty station².
12. When a decision is made to discontinue alternate working arrangements outside the duty station as of a specific date, personnel working outside of the duty station under alternate working arrangements should be communicated in writing the expected return date and be provided a reasonable advance notice (at least 21 days) before they are expected to return in order to be able to make necessary arrangements to physically report to the workplace taking into consideration travel restrictions and quarantine requirements, as applicable. This requirement does not apply to duty stations where scenario 1 b) of the Human Resources Network's Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations guidance note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020 is implemented since rotation is carried out on a pre-established scheduled.

Flexible working arrangements

13. Flexible working arrangements, such as telecommuting from within or outside the duty station, are **voluntary arrangements** agreed between personnel and their managers and require a written form. Flexible working arrangements for staff members are governed by [ST/SGB/2019/3](#) and [ST/IC/2019/15](#).
14. In the context of COVID-19, in duty stations where offices remained physically open or are reopening and generalized AWA are lifted, an increased use of telecommuting may be encouraged in order to reduce personnel footprint in UN premises and/or in duty stations, as applicable.
15. Telecommuting at the duty station is normally for up to three days a week. In the current COVID-19 context, personnel may however be authorized to telecommute for up to five days a week at the duty station, either as a blanket administrative directive or where endorsed by their manager based on personal or medical reasons, noting that medical reasons should also be endorsed by the supporting medical service, in line with section 2.2 of [ST/SGB/2019/3](#). Although flexible working arrangements should be implemented at no cost to the

² Decision to suspend AWA outside the duty station based on local conditions at the duty station that include but are not limited to decreasing cases, borders open for regular commercial flights or no restrictions on return to duty station in terms of air / land travel, intergovernmental meetings requiring on-site support at very short notice.

Organization, personnel may be authorized to utilize their home leave, family visit or reverse education grant travel entitlement to travel away from their duty station.

16. Staff members utilizing their home leave or family visit entitlement to travel away from the duty station shall be required to use a minimum of five days of annual leave during their stay in the place of home leave or family visit travel. Full flexibility as to how and when the annual leave days are taken will be exercised, taking into consideration personnel needs and exigencies of service. Therefore, the five days of annual leave can be taken at any time during the stay in the place of home leave/family visit and do not have to be taken consecutively and can be taken in either half-day or full day increments.
17. In the context of COVID-19, staff members might have been allowed or encouraged to work from outside their duty station, for instance if they were not able to return to their duty stations due to travel restrictions imposed while they were on leave or on official business. In such instances, they may not have been requested to sign an agreement, because it was de-facto AWA. As duty stations are implementing phased return to the workplace and travel restrictions are progressively lifted in some parts of the world, UN premises at some duty station are fully reopened (i.e. access is not limited to an authorized maximum number of personnel) and travel to their duty station is possible: in such situations, Alternative Working Arrangements are no longer in place.
18. In those duty stations, staff members who would like to telecommute from outside the duty station due to compelling personal circumstances may send a request to their manager to avail of flexible working arrangements outside of the duty station for an appropriate duration normally not exceeding six months (with a possible exceptional extension for three additional months) in accordance with the provisions of [ST/SGB/2019/3](#). FWA requires the establishment of a formal agreement between the staff and the manager; and foresees the adjustment of some entitlements and accrual of qualifying service which will be impacted as detailed in section 5 of [ST/IC/2019/15](#).

Performance of duties

19. Personnel are expected to demonstrate maximum professionalism, solidarity with their colleagues and continue to perform their assigned tasks to ensure they deliver on the work of the Organization.

20. Managers are reminded to continue exercising maximum flexibility, understanding and care and to adapt their demands to the impact the pandemic is having on personnel and their families.
21. Failure to report to the duty station/premises on the specified date/time may result in absence being treated as unauthorized.

Recording

22. Remote working under flexible working arrangements and alternate working arrangements approved in connection with COVID-19 pandemic should be recorded in Umoja by selecting the 'telecommuting COVID-19' option in the drop-down menu for leave request.
23. No additional attendance records should be required.
24. Following the suspension of alternate working arrangements **outside** the duty station on a specific date or upon reaching six-month of AWA outside the duty station, staff members who continue to work remotely under AWA **at** the duty station, should record their remote working days in Umoja by selecting the 'telecommuting COVID-19' option in the drop-down menu for leave request.
25. When the phased return to the office is completed and there are no longer any limitations regarding the number of personnel present on UN premises, telecommuting days requested by staff members should be recorded into Umoja by selecting the regular 'telecommuting' option in accordance with the information contained in the signed agreement between the staff member and the manager.
26. Following the suspension of alternate working arrangements **outside** the duty station on a specific date or upon reaching six-month of AWA outside the duty station, staff members who find themselves in compelling personal circumstances and have exceptionally been approved to telecommute outside of the duty station in accordance with the provisions of [ST/SGB/2019/3](#) and [ST/IC/2019/15](#) on the flexible working arrangements, should record their days into Umoja by selecting the regular 'telecommuting' option in accordance with the information contained in the signed agreement between the staff member and the manager.

ANNEX – Summary table

Alternate working arrangements (AWA) and Flexible working arrangements (FWA) in the context of COVID-19 pandemic

Criteria	Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)	Alternate Working Arrangements (AWA)
Access to UN premises	Offices are physically open. There are no limitations regarding the number of personnel present in the UN premises and if the staff member is currently outside the duty station, there are no longer travel restrictions in place preventing their return trip to their official duty station.	Offices are fully or partially physically closed but virtually open. When offices are completely closed, access is restricted to critical personnel. When offices are partially closed (phased return to offices) access is restricted to a limited number of authorized personnel.
Decision	FWA are voluntary arrangements agreed between personnel and managers. FWA should be encouraged by management both at the duty station or outside the duty station to reduce the risk of spreading the virus locally and/or to reduce the UN footprint in the locality, if needed. Managers and personnel are expected to discuss and agree taking all relevant information into account. Flexibility should be exercised for staff who may need to temporarily telecommute outside the official duty station for a limited period of time.	When offices are physically closed and AWA are implemented, personnel are requested by the Organization to work from an alternative work site, usually their residence at the official duty station ³ . This is not optional. It is mandatory.
Agreements	Approved flexible working arrangements shall be incorporated into a written agreement between personnel and manager. Deliverables are discussed and agreed upon in the written form.	AWA is mandated by the Secretary-General and heads of entities, and no agreement between the manager and personnel is required . Managers and personnel must discuss and agree on deliverables.
Recording	Personnel are required to record their FWA days in Umoja as per the signed written agreement.	Personnel are required to record their remote working days in Umoja at the end

³ Includes any accommodation provided by UN

Criteria	Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)	Alternate Working Arrangements (AWA)
	<p>Telecommuting working days approved in the context of COVID-19 shall be recorded in Umoja at the end of every week, under the 'telecommuting COVID-19'.</p> <p>The recording can be made on a daily basis or in block on a weekly basis for the days worked.</p>	<p>of every week, under the 'telecommuting COVID-19' option.</p> <p>The recording can be made on a daily basis or in block on a weekly basis for the days worked.</p>
Place of telecommuting/remote working	<p>The location is formally agreed upon in the written form between personnel and manager.</p> <p>Normally at the duty station.</p> <p>Under compelling circumstances, personnel can be allowed to telecommute away from the duty station for a limited period of time.</p>	<p>Unless they have been required to work remotely from a specific alternate location, personnel who wish to leave their duty station may be authorized to discharge their functions from any place of their choice, within or outside the country of their duty station as long as compatible with operational needs and exigencies of service.</p>
Duration	<p>A manager may authorize a staff member to work away from the office (telecommute) within the duty station up to a maximum of three days during the work week.</p> <p>In the context of COVID-19, personnel may be allowed or encouraged to telecommute on a full-time basis (i.e. 5 days a week). Personnel may be authorized to telecommute from outside the duty station for up to six months, with an exceptional extension of three months.</p>	<p>Within the official duty station, personnel are required to continue working remotely until a decision is made to let personnel return to the physical office location.</p> <p>Authorization to work remotely from outside of the official duty station under AWA should normally not exceed six consecutive months.</p>
Application	<p>Telecommuting option may not be possible for some jobs and/or at certain periods of time.</p>	<p>The requirements to work remotely apply to all UN personnel, staff or non-staff. Only personnel whose presence in UN premises is authorized can physically report to the premises.</p>

Criteria	Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)	Alternate Working Arrangements (AWA)
Working hours	<p>The total number of hours that telecommuting personnel are expected to work shall not change. Personnel shall be reachable by telephone or email during the core working hours set for their duty station, when working away from the office (telecommuting) at their official duty station.</p> <p>When telecommuting from outside of the official duty station, the working hours are established in the written agreement.</p>	<p>Core working hours may be temporarily lifted.</p> <p>Managers should exercise maximum flexibility and adapt their demands to the extent possible. Personnel should inform their managers and team members of their availability.</p> <p>No additional attendance records should be required but normal procedures to notify managers of absence still apply.</p>
Equipment	<p>Personnel telecommuting must obtain at their own expense, the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions.</p>	<p>Heads of entities shall, to the extent possible, provide personnel with the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions from an alternative work site.</p> <p>Personnel who do not have an Organization-provided laptop are encouraged to use their private equipment during this time of crisis.</p>
Travel and DSA	<p>If personnel are authorized to work away from the office (telecommute) from outside their duty station, no travel and DSA shall be payable.</p>	<p>In rare cases when personnel are required to work remotely from outside their duty station at the request of the organization, travel and DSA may exceptionally be payable.</p> <p>However, if personnel choose to work remotely from outside their duty station, e.g. country of home leave, no travel and DSA shall be payable but eligible personnel may be authorized to use their home leave/family visit/reverse education grant travel entitlement.</p>
Payment of benefits and entitlements when	<p>Some of the benefits and entitlements shall be suspended if personnel choose to telecommute from outside their duty station in accordance with section 5 of</p>	<p>Payment of danger pay is not payable during the period that personnel are working remotely outside the official duty station approved for danger pay.</p>

Criteria	Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA)	Alternate Working Arrangements (AWA)
outside the duty station	ST/IC/2019/15 on Flexible working arrangements.	<p>Accrual of qualifying service toward R&R will also be suspended.</p> <p>All other entitlements will continue to be paid in relation to the official duty station, including for exceptional situations when AWA is authorized to continue beyond six months.</p>
Medical insurance	Enrolment in medical insurance plans are made based on the official duty station so doctor's visits and hospitalization in a different location, particularly outside the country of the duty station may result in out of pocket medical expenses.	Enrolment in medical insurance plans are made based of the official duty station so doctor's visits and hospitalization in a different location, particularly outside the country of the duty station may result in out of pocket medical expenses.
Appendix D	Claims for compensation in the event of death, injury or illness attributable to the performance of official duties under Appendix D to the Staff Rules are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, including cases involving telecommuting. All claims for compensation will be subject to the review of the UN Advisory Board on Compensation Claims (ABCC).	Claims for compensation in the event of death, injury or illness attributable to the performance of official duties under Appendix D to the Staff Rules are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, including cases involving alternate working arrangements. All claims for compensation will be subject to the review of the UN Advisory Board on Compensation Claims (ABCC).