



18 April 2019

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## Secretary-General's bulletin

### Flexible working arrangements

The Secretary-General, recognizing the importance of flexible working arrangements in balancing the demands on staff while at work with life outside the office and the challenge of finding new and better ways to manage people, time, space and workloads effectively, and for the purpose of implementing staff rule 1.4 on hours of work, hereby promulgates the following:

#### Section 1

##### General provisions

1.1. Flexible working arrangements are adjustments to the normal working hours and locations. Normal working hours may vary according to each duty station. In order to allow managers and staff the maximum flexibility to make gains in work-life balance while maintaining the effective and efficient delivery of the work of the Organization, the use of flexible working arrangements may be authorized in all departments, offices and missions of the United Nations Secretariat.

1.2. Flexible working arrangements should be differentiated from leave. Leave is considered an absence from duty; therefore, if a staff member wishes to be excused from duty, leave must be requested and approved.

1.3. In line with the policy on the organizational resilience management system and in order to facilitate business continuity during crises, staff members may be requested to work from an alternative work site. Such situations are exceptional and shall not be considered as flexible working arrangements. During such exceptional situations, the Organization shall, to the extent possible, provide affected staff members with the equipment and resources required to discharge their official functions.

#### Section 2

##### Guiding principles

2.1. Flexible working arrangements may be authorized subject to the following guiding principles:

(a) While there is no right to flexible working arrangements, such arrangements are in line with the efforts of the Organization to be responsive and inclusive and achieve gender parity, and therefore should be viewed favourably as a useful tool by staff and managers alike, where exigencies of service allow;



(b) Flexible working arrangements are voluntary arrangements agreed between staff and managers, such as first reporting officers;<sup>1</sup>

(c) Managers should discuss the appropriate possibilities for staff members to avail themselves of flexible working arrangements. It is recognized that flexible working arrangement options may not be possible for some jobs and/or at certain periods of time;

(d) Staff members should seek written approval from their managers to avail themselves of the flexible working arrangements. When denying such requests, managers shall provide the basis for the non-approval in writing. Managers may suspend or cancel previously approved flexible working arrangements at any time due to exigencies of service or unsatisfactory performance. Staff members shall be informed of the basis for suspension or cancellation in writing. The Office of Human Resources shall monitor the implementation of the present bulletin and report on a regular basis to the Secretary-General on the Organization's usage of the different flexible working arrangements options;

(e) Approved flexible working arrangements shall be incorporated into an agreement between the staff member and manager. The agreement shall specify the duration and specifics related to the flexible working arrangement. A combination of one or more flexible working arrangements modalities may be authorized. One-time, ad hoc arrangements do not require the establishment of an agreement;

(f) It is the responsibility of all parties to the agreement to optimize the benefits of flexibility while minimizing potential problems. When staff members avail themselves of flexible working arrangements, their productivity and quality of output must be maintained at a satisfactory level, as assessed by their managers. First reporting officers should clearly communicate to staff their responsibilities and agreed deliverables. First reporting officers and staff are reminded of their performance management obligations, outlined in administrative instruction [ST/AI/2010/5](#);

(g) No extra costs may be incurred by the Organization as a result of any of the flexible working arrangements;

(h) The use of flexible working arrangements requires careful planning and preparation on the part of all concerned. The relevant administrative office, with overall guidance from the Office of Human Resources, shall provide assistance to managers and staff, as required.

2.2. Certain components of the flexible working arrangements may be advised by the Medical Director or a duly authorized Medical Officer as being suitable to accommodate medical restrictions or limitations as part of a time-limited return-to-work programme. In line with the general principles of reasonable accommodations for short-term disability, if that advice is rejected, the manager would be required to establish that the requested accommodations represent a disproportionate or undue burden on the workplace.

### **Section 3**

#### **Flexible working arrangements options**

##### **Staggered working hours**

3.1. Staff members may adjust the start and end times of their working days, provided they work the required number of working hours as promulgated for their

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<sup>1</sup> First reporting officers are considered to be best placed to assess the functions and performance of staff members when requests for flexible working arrangements are submitted and discussed.

duty station and are present during the core working hours established for their duty station. Staff must complete the balance of working hours for each day before, after or partly before and partly after the core period.

### **Compressed work schedule**

3.2. Ten working days in nine: under this option, all the hours that would normally have been worked during a period of 10 working days are compressed into 9 working days. This redistribution of normal working hours allows staff members, every other week, to take one day off during the normal 10-day work period. Taking into account the need to ensure appropriate coverage for exigencies of service, the staff member and the manager shall agree which day during the 10-day period may be taken off. The day off should be taken during the 10-day period and cannot be accumulated.

3.3. Five working days in four and a half: under this option, all the hours that would normally have been worked during a period of five working days are compressed into four and a half working days. This redistribution of normal working hours allows staff members to take one half day off during every week. Taking into account the need to ensure appropriate coverage for exigencies of service, the staff member and the manager shall agree which half-day during the five-day period may be taken off. The half day off should be taken during the five-day period and cannot be accumulated.

### **Scheduled break for external learning activities**

3.4. Staff members wishing to attend external courses relevant to their professional development at universities or other institutions of learning may request breaks of up to six hours per week. The hours spent away from work during a particular week must be made up during that week.

### **Working away from the office (telecommuting)**

3.5. Staff members may be authorized, upon written request, to work from an alternative work site at their official duty station when such an arrangement is consistent with the nature of the work involved. Care should be taken to ensure that telecommuting does not result in additional demands on other colleagues.

3.6. Authorization for staff members to work from an alternative work site at their official duty station may be given if the relevant staff members shall be reachable by telephone or email during the core working hours set for their duty station, and if they have, or obtain at their own expense, the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions. Such equipment shall normally include a computer, access to the Internet and a telephone.

3.7. A manager may allow a staff member to telecommute within the duty station up to a maximum of three days during the work week. Telecommuting may be authorized in units of half or full days, as an ad hoc or a regular arrangement.

3.8. In cases where there are compelling personal circumstances, consideration may be given to allowing staff members to telecommute within the duty station for more than the maximum number of days set out in section 3.7 above.

3.9. During the period of telecommuting, managers may require staff members to report to the office for work-related meetings and other events if alternative methods of communication and representation are not suitable and direct face-to-face contact is necessary for mandate implementation.

3.10. In cases where there are compelling personal circumstances, consideration may be given to allowing staff members to telecommute from outside the staff member's official duty station for an appropriate duration not exceeding six months.

Managers may, in exceptional circumstances, consider an extension of the authorization to remotely telecommute for an additional period not exceeding three months. Remote telecommuting does not constitute a change of official duty station within the meaning of staff rule 4.8 (a).

3.11. In such circumstances, staff members telecommuting from outside their official duty station must have, at their own expense, the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions. Moreover, the total number of hours that telecommuting staff members are expected to work shall not change, regardless of the workplace. Managers may also require staff members to report to the office for work-related meetings and other events at the staff member's own expense during such an arrangement, depending on the nature of the work being performed, if alternative methods of communication and representation are not suitable and direct face-to-face contact is necessary for mandate implementation. Such a requirement should be agreed upon before the start or extension of the arrangement.

3.12. The staff member shall not be entitled to any additional benefits or entitlements as a result of such telecommuting arrangements outside of the staff member's official duty station. The payment of any benefits and entitlements that require the physical presence of staff members at their official duty station (for instance danger pay), shall be suspended for the period that staff members are telecommuting from outside of their official duty station.

3.13. The fact that a staff member is authorized to telecommute shall not alter the manner in which the staff member is managed and evaluated.

3.14. Compensation for death, injury or illness having occurred while the staff member was telecommuting is governed by appendix D to the Staff Rules.

#### **Section 4**

##### **Final provisions**

4.1. The present bulletin shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.

4.2. The Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/4](#), entitled "Flexible working arrangements", is hereby superseded. Administrative instruction [ST/AI/408](#), entitled "Introduction of staggered working hours at Headquarters" is hereby abolished.

(Signed) António **Guterres**  
Secretary-General