

UN System Model Policy on Flexible Working Arrangements

I. General Provisions

1. Flexible working arrangements (FWA) are voluntary adjustments to the normal working hours and locations, agreed between UN personnel¹ and their managers in accordance with the Organizations' Staff Regulations and Rules and relevant internal policies. Flexible working arrangements provide a foundation for work-life harmony and offer UN personnel the flexibility to effectively manage both their work and personal responsibilities. These arrangements support overall well-being, including the mental and physical health of UN personnel as well as motivation, productivity and attraction and retention of talent.
2. The FWA modality is different from leave or time off where applicable, which are considered an absence from work. If personnel need to be excused from work, leave or paid time off (including compensatory time-off) must be requested and approved. Work-related training and related activities are also not flexible working arrangements.
3. FWA is a voluntary arrangement initiated by personnel and must be distinguished from alternate working arrangements, which are mandatory and defined by the Organization.
4. The FWA modality is applicable for all personnel. Entities should ensure equal applicability across the workforce so that all personnel have fair and equitable access to a range of flexible working arrangements modalities. Managers are expected to model and promote these arrangements, subject to exigencies of service.
5. Personnel are not required to provide reasons for requesting flexible working arrangements; however, they are encouraged to inform managers of any pertinent personal circumstances. Managers are encouraged to consider FWA requests favourably and only deny requests that are incompatible with functions and/or exigencies of service. Any decision (approval or denial) should be made in writing and, if denied the reason should be clearly justified.
6. The use of FWA is normally time bound and approved for a specific duration. They should be reviewed and discussed regularly, as part of ongoing communications between managers and personnel. An arrangement may be suspended or discontinued by personnel or their manager, should new organizational requirements for the position, personal circumstances, or failure to adhere to the arrangement, necessitate such suspension or discontinuation and in either case an appropriate notice period is required.
7. Although part-time work for some entities may not constitute a flexible working modality, however, it can nevertheless be utilized in order to provide flexibility. The pandemic has turned the way we work upside down, and as we consider what the future of work looks like, it is fundamentally important that the UN System is in a position to capitalize on this opportunity to create the necessary flexibility.

¹ The term "personnel" shall include staff personnel (e.g. international and locally-recruited) and non-staff personnel with a direct contractual relationship with <entity> (e.g. consultants, individual contractors, interns, UN Volunteers).

Explanatory notes

The FWA modality has been incorporated into many existing policies including in the context of the UN Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity and the Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System. They are a powerful tool to promote work-life harmony and complement the mandates of the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy amongst others. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of change and made new ways of working possible that were previously inconceivable in the UN context.

This modality is intended for all personnel irrespective of social, marital or other status. Entities should ensure even applicability across the workforce so that all personnel have fair and equitable access to flexible working options, thereby supporting personnel across a range of personal and professional situations and negating any gender stereotyping or biases. Managers should be mindful that flexible working is not only related to telecommuting and are encouraged to explore other modalities that could be suitable.

While recognizing that not all functions may be suitable for all types of flexible working arrangements, managers are encouraged to explore the range of FWA modalities to see what might be suitable for the specific job role, team and context. Managers should be empowered to decentralize and expedite the processing of flexible work requests.

Entities with a field presence will need to consider critical functions and the operational environment, noting that certain roles cannot be fulfilled easily if working in another country where time differences may become an issue. Entities must ensure that operational requirements are taken into consideration.

Entities should give due consideration to situations of dual UN career couples where both spouses/partners are UN system personnel. Managers of personnel whose spouse/partner is being reassigned shall give maximum consideration for remote working from the duty station where their spouse/partner has been reassigned, provided the request can be accommodated within the exigencies of service and there is no cost implication.

II. Guiding Principles

Trust and accountability

8. Flexible working arrangements are based on mutual trust, which is key to a successful professional relationship between managers and their team members. Managers need to provide clear guidance on rules and expectations including deliverables and timelines, irrespective of working arrangements.

Management by results and effective communication

9. The work of all personnel, including those who avail of flexible working arrangements, must be planned and evaluated through results-based approaches, with clear feedback and effective communication. No increased workload should be created for other colleagues as a result of those availing of flexible working arrangements and vice-versa.

People-centered approach

10. The implementation of a wide range of flexible working arrangements must put well-being and health (both mental and physical), and safety and security of personnel at the centre. Entities should ensure the availability of necessary tools, guidance and training to allow an effective, inclusive and coherent application of their respective organizational policies on flexible working arrangements.

Resourcing and support

11. Flexible working arrangements should normally not result in additional costs for Organizations. However, active reallocation of resources may be required, such as the provision of laptops or other equipment. Organizations may decide to cover certain costs. Other support could be advice on how to set up an ergonomic workstation and how the workplace should be set up to be efficient and environmentally friendly in use of its space and internet connections.

Flexibility for field contexts

12. Field locations may have more limitations to remote working due to the expectations of physical presence with the host government, beneficiaries and external partners. With this in mind, flexible working arrangements should be adapted to create duty station-specific solutions, in accordance with Organizations' applicable policies. Flexible working arrangements can help to support physical and mental health of personnel serving in challenging work environments (in particular in those duty stations with difficult conditions of work and life) and therefore mitigate the risks of burnout and absences due to sick leave.
13. Organizations with a field presence, particularly those in hardship duty stations, may consider alternative means of flexible work arrangements such as the establishment of hybrid teams that may be formed by personnel based within and outside the duty station on a rotational basis in accordance with the respective applicable policy framework. When doing so, Organizations should be mindful that the applicability of such arrangements may vary from place to place based on the different local contexts.

Ecological responsibility

14. Entities must strive to ensure that sustainability and earth-friendly measures are incorporated into all facets of our operations. Ecologically conscious decision-making is also an important factor to apply when considering the feasibility of the FWA modality to ensure a lighter and greener environmental footprint.

Explanatory notes

Entities are expected to move towards flexibility and a focus on the delivery of measurable results, and away from a "face-time / presenteeism" culture. Entities may wish to augment existing guidance or develop new materials to support the management of virtual and hybrid teams. Managers are expected to be mindful that the right to disconnect should be respected everywhere, including in the field, especially in hardship duty stations to the extent feasible, acknowledging that each duty station may differ and stable internet connections may not be readily available to all.

Core working hours may be agreed on, to ensure effective communication and coordination between managers and team members, if necessary.

Entities may decide to provide support to cover certain costs where feasible. Other types of support could be guidance/ assistance for home ergonomic workstations, internet connections or other technological support. Additionally, entities may leverage existing systems contracts to gain discounts for staff who may wish to avail of new equipment. Looking towards the future of work it is important to consider long term teleworking and how the workplace should be set up to be efficient and environmentally friendly in use of its space, to and activate the savings that can be gained.

Enabling personnel to make green choices at their workplace and home offices represents a vital change that must be normalized as entities take responsibility for championing environmental stewardship. For example, video conferences reduce the need for face-to-face interactions and reductions in unnecessary travel is an obvious place to start increasing the 'greening' of the UN System's operations.

III. Flexible Working Arrangements Modalities

Flexible working hours

15. Flexible, or staggered, working hours allow personnel to adjust the start and end times of their working days, provided that they work the required number of working hours in any given day or week and are present during the common work week or core working hours established for their duty stations, if any. Subject to exigencies of service, the full extent of flexibility should be given to allow a personalized schedule in accordance with Organizations' internal policies

Compressed work schedule

16. A compressed work schedule allows personnel to redistribute the daily working hours in a given period to accrue days off. The working time that would normally have been spent during a period of one or two weeks is compressed into longer working days by redistributing the number of working hours per day. Normally, this redistribution of normal working hours allows personnel to have one day off or two days off, as applicable, per month. Variations on the number of hours and days off may be applied, subject to agreement between the personnel and their manager to accommodate specific circumstances in accordance with the Organizations' internal policies. Days accrued as a result of a compressed work schedule should not be carried forward, accumulated, or credited to annual leave or compensatory time off.

17. Entities are expected to consider various "compressed time" options for compressed work schedules. In order to grant maximum flexibility, entities could also require that the working hours required for one month need to be completed within that same month.

18. A special compressed work schedule or special compressed time off may also be offered to locally-recruited personnel working in hardship duty stations, including locations where danger pay applies. Entities may consider a modality that consists of one week off that is not charged against annual leave to be granted after a continuous period of time worked on a compressed work schedule.

Explanatory notes

Locally-recruited personnel face specific challenges in hardship duty stations. In addition to isolation from families and added stress and anxiety due to local conditions, (e.g. availability of primary goods and services), they face distinct security risks for them and their families. Special Emergency Compressed Work is a way to mitigate the severity of those conditions. In humanitarian emergencies and countries where women tend to assume most caregiving responsibilities, Special Emergency Compressed Work can help sustain gender parity by allowing them to spend more time with their families while working in remote environments. Entities are encouraged to consider transportation options to the duty station where the main office in the country is based (normally the capital), or to another destination at the staff member's choice, on a voluntary basis.

Telecommuting within the duty station

19. Telecommuting within the duty station allows personnel to agree on scheduled working days per week to work at an alternative site to the workplace at the official duty station. This may be authorized in units of half or full days. Telecommuting does not affect the duties or responsibilities of personnel and where different time zones may apply, 'overlapping time agreements' may be determined by managers regarding core working hours.

Telecommuting outside the duty station

20. Telecommuting outside the official duty station allows personnel to work from an alternative location for a limited period of time, according to parameters defined by the Organization and the Host Country, if applicable and in accordance with the conditions of service applicable to the different categories of personnel.
21. Personnel should understand that undertaking these arrangements may impact their remuneration, benefits and entitlements. Entities should make this clear in their policy frameworks in accordance with the relevant conditions of service and/or decisions of their governing body.
22. Personnel are responsible for the travel cost to and from the alternative location. Normally, personnel should also be responsible for making administrative arrangements (such as obtaining visa, office space, internet, phone, computer) unless provided otherwise by Organizations' internal policies. Personnel must consider the impact and possible required changes to medical evacuation, medical insurance coverage, visa status, and privileges and immunities. Personnel and managers should discuss the impact of time zone differences and other relevant aspects.

Explanatory notes

Since the compensation package for international professional staff is associated with the principle of cost of living and for national staff on the competitive labour market conditions, salaries and location-based entitlements will be adjusted after a cumulative period of full-time remote work outside the duty station.

Entities are expected to exercise flexibility in regard to requests to telecommute outside the duty stations as there may be multiple reasons that may necessitate this such as dual careers amongst compelling reasons.

For different entities, the adjustment of location-based and salary-related entitlements due to telecommuting outside the duty station may take effect immediately or after several months. It should be noted that there is an issue of fairness when it comes to different entitlements and allowances among entities at the same duty station.

An appropriate period of notice for the discontinuation or suspension of FWAs should be determined in discussion between managers and personnel and a longer period of notice should be considered for those who are telecommuting outside the duty station.

Part-time employment

23. Part-time employment allows personnel to adjust their work to less than 100 per cent full-time work. Part-time work may be on 90%, 80%, 75%, 60% or 50% of the established work time, as agreed between personnel and their managers.
24. Personnel should be made aware that salary, benefits, allowances shall be prorated according to the percentage of time worked. Under a part-time work schedule, salaries, benefits and allowances are adjusted to the agreed proportion of work at the staff member's grade level and step and forms the basis for determining prorated salary and applicable allowances, except for health and dental insurance. Regarding the latter part-time personnel will be granted half the subsidy given to full-time personnel and will pay the rest of the premium themselves.
25. Entities should ascertain whether host country agreements may require full-time employment for visa purposes, as well as any other limitations in relation to the privileges and immunities of the Organization and make this information available to their personnel. Entities are encouraged to make efforts to overcome these barriers, including the possibility of seeking clarifications from national authorities or revisiting host country agreements, if deemed necessary.
26. The job-sharing modality is a form of part-time work that allows two personnel at the same level to share the responsibilities of one full-time post, with salaries, benefits and allowances pro-rated, each on a 50 percent basis, when such arrangements are feasible and deemed appropriate within an office or programme. Entities are expected to expand this to all personnel where feasible.
27. Entities are expected to consider the use of a gradual return to work where appropriate. Personnel have the right to avail of part-time employment to transition back to work after an injury, illness, or disability, as recommended by medical services. Personnel may also avail of part-time employment to transition back to work for non-health related issues such as a broad range of care-giving needs.
28. Phased retirement offers personnel the option of having an interim period of part-time work to ease the transition to retirement. There is no obligation or automatic right to phased retirement arrangements. Upon request from personnel phased retirement will be considered in the light of workload demands of the office. Requests for phased retirement will be considered during the three years immediately preceding the envisaged date of retirement. Phased retirement can be flexible and aligned with part-time options. The contractual status of personnel in a phased retirement plan will not be affected. However, the conditions of service will be adjusted according to the ratio which part-time employment bears to full-time as provided above.

Explanatory notes

Personnel today have multi-faceted needs. Entities' are expected to broadly support new ways of working that normalize flexible working options that include everyone. Entities may be able to support work-life harmony by combining part-time with FWA and reimagining working hours to fit more personalized schedules that deliver results and to secure optimal staffing and operational flexibility. Entities should leverage a range of flexible modalities to ensure that it is also possible for personnel to excel in part-time roles.

Part-time roles may support personnel for multiple reasons throughout the career lifecycle. The part-time modality shouldn't limit ambition or hinder opportunities for growth but allow for a flexible, fulfilling and challenging career. Part-time work should be available equitably for men and women.

Phased retirement is intended to encourage experienced personnel to remain in service on a part-time basis to ensure the continuity of operations. It is also designed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge so that less experienced personnel are equipped through mentoring and training to undertake the same responsibilities as those preparing to retire. Such programmes are voluntary and require the agreement of both parties (personnel and entity).

Combination of flexible working arrangements modalities

29. Combining different modalities of flexible working arrangements may be considered if it follows the guiding principles laid out above, for example telecommuting outside the duty station in combination with flexible working hours to accommodate for time zone differences, in accordance with Organizations' relevant internal policies.

Explanatory notes

Different entities may allow certain entitlements, e.g. Rest and Recuperation or Special Leave to be combined with Flexible Working Arrangements. Individual entities should determine how flexible working arrangement modalities laid out in this model policy can be best combined with existing entitlements.

IV. Monitoring and reporting

30. Accountability mechanisms should be put in place to promote transparency, fairness and equity in the implementation of flexible working arrangements. Organizations should be encouraged to regularly collect gender-disaggregated and other relevant data to monitor and evaluate the implementation of their organizational policy on FWA.
31. Requests for FWA should be submitted and recorded in the Organization's enterprise resource planning system where feasible. This will help to track requests and provide data on the use of FWA, as well as impacts of FWA on absenteeism, retention and costs and obstacles to full implementation. Disaggregated, anonymized data should be monitored, analyzed and reported regularly to the executive leadership.