

## OHR Policy Guideline

### Flexible working arrangements (FWA) and alternate working arrangements (AWA)

OHR/PG/2024/7 – 26 December 2024

#### I. Introduction

1. The telecommuting option under flexible working arrangements (FWA) and alternate working arrangements (AWA) refers to situations where staff members work away from the office. However, these two working modalities address fundamentally different needs and challenges, follow different decision-making processes and result in different impacts on benefits and allowances.
2. ST/SGB/2019/3 and ST/IC/2019/15 on Flexible working arrangements provide the policy framework for the implementation of these two modalities for staff members. The purpose of this document is to provide additional policy information and clarify the policy differences between FWA and AWA.
3. Flexible working arrangements extend also to non-staff personnel under the same principles as the ones included in the Organization's above-mentioned policies. Accordingly, the principles included in this guideline are applicable to all UN personnel within the parameters of their specific conditions of contracts and terms of employment. Non-staff personnel should consult with their local HR office or Executive Office, as applicable, to understand the impact of telecommuting from outside the duty station on their contractual arrangements.
4. This guideline does not replace the applicable Staff Regulations and Rules and relevant administrative issuances, which prevail in case of conflict with the provisions in the guideline.

#### II. Flexible working arrangements (FWA)

5. FWA are **voluntary arrangements**, initiated by the staff members and approved by their managers<sup>1</sup>. There are currently four types of FWA available at the UN Secretariat:
  - a. staggered working hours,
  - b. compressed work schedule,

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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 FWA are submitted and discussed.

- c. scheduled break for external learning activities, and
  - d. working away from the office (telecommuting – inside or outside the duty station).
6. FWA require **prior approval**, and the establishment of a **formal agreement** between the staff and their manager when the arrangement is of a **continuous** nature.
7. No formal agreement is required in the case of a one-time ad hoc arrangement, though **prior approval by the manager is still required**.
8. Approval of FWA is **subject to exigencies of service**.
9. **No extra costs may be incurred by the Organization** because of FWA. That means that staff members should obtain at their own expense any additional equipment that may be needed as a result of the arrangements. It also means staff members telecommuting from outside the duty station are responsible for any additional expenses resulting from this arrangement, such as but not limited to, additional travel expenses that may arise for travel from the place of telecommuting, as opposed to the official duty station, to the authorized destination.
10. FWA can be **suspended or cancelled at any time by the manager - normally the first reporting officer (FRO) due to exigencies of service or unsatisfactory performance**.
11. For the purpose of this guideline, the following sections will address the option d. working away from the office (telecommuting – within or outside the duty station).

#### **Telecommuting within the duty station**

12. In accordance with the provisions of ST/SGB/2019/3, **telecommuting within the duty station** may be authorized for up to a maximum of three days during the work week (Section 3.7). Further, staff members with compelling personal circumstances may also be authorized to telecommute more than three days during the work week (Section 3.8).

#### **Telecommuting outside the duty station**

13. In accordance with the provisions of ST/SGB/2019/3, **telecommuting outside of the duty station** may be authorized for a period **not exceeding six months** for staff members with compelling personal circumstances. Further, **in exceptional circumstances**, an additional period of three months of telecommuting outside of the duty station may be authorized, bringing the maximum duration of telecommuting

outside the duty station to a total of 195 working days (excluding weekends, official holidays and periods of authorized leave) (Section 3.10).

14. **Heads of entity (HoEs) do not have the authority to approve telecommuting away from the duty station beyond nine months.**
15. Telecommuting from outside the duty station does not constitute a change of official duty station within the meaning of staff rule 4.8 (a). However, **the payment of some benefits and allowances and the accrual of qualifying service requiring the physical presence at the official duty station will be impacted** as detailed in section 5 of ST/IC/2019/15. Entitlements are not adjusted during periods of authorized leave of any type. In addition, the 30 days mentioned in section 5 of ST/IC/2019/5 should be counted as working days and cumulatively. Therefore, the count pauses when the staff member is on any type of approved leave, official holidays or weekends but it does not reset the clock, and the count is resumed when the staff member returns from such leave and continues to telecommute outside the duty station.
16. **FWA outside the duty station cannot be used to remotely onboard staff members. Exceptional remote onboarding requests to address force majeure situations such as personnel restrictions authorized by UNDSS may be sent to the ASG/OHR for review.**
17. Eligible staff members who are authorized to telecommute from outside their duty station may utilize their home leave or family visit entitlement to travel to their place of telecommuting, subject to meeting the conditions of the entitlement. In such instances, they are required to use a minimum of five days of annual leave during their stay at the place of home leave or family visit travel. 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 during their period of telecommuting outside of the duty station.
18. Staff members who are telecommuting from outside their duty station under FWA need to:
  - a. update their security clearance profiles in *TRIP* with their travel and location of stay. This will ensure that staff remain informed of security updates and supported by local security arrangements;
  - b. be aware of the fact that enrollment in medical insurance plans is based on their official duty station. Medical expenses, doctor's visits and hospitalization occurring at a different location, particularly outside the country of the duty station might result in out-of-pocket medical expenses. This is especially important for staff members enrolled in a Worldwide Insurance Plan travelling to a location in the United States

where health care costs are significantly higher compared to other countries;

- c. understand that the payment of some benefits and allowances and the accrual of qualifying service requiring the physical presence at the official duty station will be impacted as detailed in section 5 of ST/IC/2019/15; and
- 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.

### **Requesting and reviewing requests**

19. Telecommuting, be it on a regular or ad hoc basis, requires a written request from the staff member and a prior written approval from the manager/FRO.
20. Staff members who wish to avail themselves of telecommuting on a regular basis should submit a request in writing through the established process at the duty station.<sup>2</sup> One time, ad hoc telecommuting at the duty station can be requested and approved by email.
21. FROs are considered to be best placed to assess the functions and performance of staff members, and therefore to approve FWA. However, HoEs may determine that requests for FWA should be reviewed at the level of a service or a division or any other relevant organizational unit. In such instances, HoEs should communicate the approval process to all staff members.
22. While telecommuting is not an entitlement or a right, staff members' requests for FWA should be viewed favorably as a useful tool by staff and managers alike, where exigencies of service allow.
23. When denying requests for FWA, managers must provide the basis for the non-approval in writing.
24. In using their discretion to approve or deny FWA requests, managers should ensure that their decision is reasonable and procedurally correct to avoid unfairness or arbitrariness.

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<sup>2</sup> A Secretariat-wide module for the end-to-end administration of FWA in Umoja is currently under development.

### **Cases referred for medical review (workplace accommodation):**

25. If staff and managers can reach an agreement, there is no need to refer to medical services, even for requests based on medical reasons. Staff should not be required to disclose medical information with their managers, they can however choose to do so.
26. Medical services only provide a recommendation; the final decision rests with the manager.

### **Compelling personal circumstances**

27. While it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of compelling personal circumstances, the following are examples of what could be considered as falling into this category:
  - Death of a close family member
  - Serious sickness of a close family member
  - Care of an elderly family member / child
  - Reasonable accommodation as part of a time-limited return to work programme after a period of extended sick leave
  - Workplace accommodation for medical reasons recommended by DHMOSH
  - Workplace accommodation for medical reasons not requiring DHMOSH recommendation
  - Lack of support system at the duty station while facing a challenging life event
28. Although some of the above-mentioned circumstances are permanent in nature, it is important to keep in mind that **arrangements approved on the basis of compelling personal circumstances are time-bound, including in the case of telecommuting at the duty station.**
29. When requesting telecommuting based on compelling personal circumstances (i.e., more than three days per week at the duty station or telecommuting outside the duty station), staff members should indicate the circumstances that justify their request without divulging confidential medical or sensitive personal information.
30. Managers, in turn, should not seek sensitive information. They should assess whether the staff member can carry out their functions while maintaining their productivity and quality of outputs at a satisfactory level, including meeting the exigencies of service.

### III. Alternate working arrangements (AWA)

31. AWA are implemented at the request of the Organization to facilitate business continuity during exceptional situations, crisis and emergencies.
32. Exceptional situations include but are not limited to natural disasters, wars, civil unrest as well as situations where there is a need to temporarily restrict access to UN premises (e.g. public health requirements, emergency repairs which may pose a threat to the safety of personnel, large office space renovations for which no sufficient swing space is available, and staff are required to rotate in the office).
33. AWA are mandatory and are therefore different in nature from the voluntary agreements under FWA.
34. AWA is normally at the duty station. Under rare and exceptional circumstances, HoEs may authorize AWA outside the duty station or outside the country of the duty station. This would be applicable for instance when the Organization is not able to provide physical office space or another alternate work location for a temporary and time-bound period.
35. The scope of application, alongside the respective delegation of authority applicable at the duty station concerned, will determine which official has the authority to decide the implementation of AWA:
  - a) When AWA applies to all UN presence at the duty station (e.g., natural disaster affecting the UN compound), the decision is taken by:
    - i the Secretary-General at UNHQ;
    - ii outside UNHQ:
      - a. the Director-Generals of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Nairobi, and Vienna;
      - b. the UN Resident Coordinator, except at the duty stations mentioned above, as applicable;
      - c. in all other cases (i.e., there is no Resident Coordinator and at duty stations other than Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi): the UN Secretariat entity with the largest number of staff within the country.

- b) when AWA only applies to one entity (e.g., emergency repairs on one or several floors occupied by one single entity) or one individual (e.g., staff members stranded due to air travel disruptions while on official business), the decision is taken by the head of the entity concerned.
36. Depending on the circumstances, the decision to implement AWA may be made by or based on a recommendation from the Designated Official for Security (e.g., civil unrest), the Occupational Safety and Health Committee (e.g., public health concerns), or based on public guidance from local authorities.
37. When considering implementing AWA to all staff members at the duty station, the decision-making authority should consult staff representatives, except when based on security reasons.
38. When a decision to implement AWA applies to all staff members at the duty station, the official with delegated authority should consult the other UN separately administered funds and programmes and specialized agencies present at the duty station with a view to harmonize, as much as feasible, the arrangements applicable to staff members across the organizations of the UN common system.
39. **As AWA is initiated by the Organization**, entities implementing AWA should, **to the extent possible**, provide affected staff members with **the equipment and resources required to discharge their official functions**.
40. AWA are meant to support business continuity during crisis and exceptional situations. Consequently, the arrangement should be implemented for the shortest duration possible, normally **not exceeding six months**.
41. Decisions to discontinue AWA should be communicated to staff members in writing and provide reasonable advance notice so that staff members can make necessary arrangements to physically report to the workplace. A notice of seven days would be considered reasonable if staff members were on AWA at the duty station and at least 21 days if they were away from the duty station. Notice is not required when the duration of AWA is pre-determined and announced in advance (e.g., closure for emergency repairs or for renovation projects with a set timeline).
42. **AWA cannot be used to remotely on-board staff members nor to address longer-term workspace shortage at the official duty station. Exceptional remote onboarding requests to address force majeure situations such as personnel restrictions authorized by UNDSS may be sent to the ASG/OHR for review.**

43. In situations where the Organization requires staff members to work remotely from a designated alternative work site, travel to that location, alongside with the applicable DSA will be payable, except when personnel restrictions are authorized in line with chapter IV of the security policy manual (i.e., security relocation or evacuation). In such instances, Section A of chapter VI of the security policy manual on Administrative and Logistic Support for Security Operations will apply instead.
44. In other cases, if staff members wish to leave the duty station or designated alternative work site at their own initiative, no DSA or travel is payable, but eligible staff members may be authorized to use their entitlement to home leave, family visit or reverse education grant travel, if applicable and may combine with telecommuting under the terms of FWA, if conditions are fulfilled.
45. Staff members utilizing their home leave or family visit entitlement to travel away from the duty station or designated alternative worksite are required to use a minimum of five days of annual leave during their stay at the place of home leave or family visit travel. The five days of annual leave can be taken at any time during the stay at 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.
46. Staff members who are working remotely outside of their duty station under AWA need to:
  - a. update their security clearance profiles in TRIP with their travel and location of stay. This will ensure that staff remain informed of security updates and supported by local security arrangements;
  - b. be aware of the fact that enrollment in medical insurance plans is based on their official duty station. Medical expenses, doctor's visits and hospitalization occurring at a different location, particularly outside the country of the duty station might result in out-of-pocket medical expenses. This is especially important for staff members enrolled in a Worldwide Insurance Plan travelling to a location in the United States where health care costs are significantly higher compared to other countries;
  - c. understand that the payment of danger pay, where applicable, is not payable for the period that the staff members 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; and



- e. know that other benefits and allowances will continue to be paid in relation to their official duty station, including hardship and non-family allowances, including for exceptional situations if it is decided that AWA outside the duty station continue for more than 6 months. This, however, only applies to staff members who have been installed at the duty station prior to the implementation of AWA. For newly appointed staff members who are exceptionally onboarded remotely and working away from their official duty station due to the implementation of AWA, entitlements specific to the official duty station such as hardship, non-family allowance, family visit, rest and recuperation, rental subsidy will not be payable until such time the new staff member is traveled by the UN and reports physically to the official duty station. In other words, they will only be payable upon travel of the new staff member to the official duty station.

#### **IV. Relationship between AWA and FWA**

- 47. When AWA at the duty station is implemented or when an alternative work site is established and staff members wish to leave, at their own initiative, the duty station or the designated alternative work site, as applicable, they will need to request an authorization for telecommuting outside the duty station under FWA in accordance with provisions of section 3.10 of ST/SGB/2019/3.
- 48. Following the discontinuation of AWA, staff members who face compelling personal circumstances may request an authorization to telecommute for more than 3 days per week at the duty station or may request an authorization to telecommute outside the duty station, as applicable, under FWA in accordance with the provisions of sections 3.8 and 3.10 of ST/SGB/2019/3 respectively.
- 49. In instances where AWA is implemented while a staff member is telecommuting away from the duty station, the period of telecommuting under FWA is suspended, and the staff member is considered on AWA. In such cases, benefits and allowances related to the duty station are paid for periods of AWA exceeding 30 days. Once AWA is revoked, the staff member's period of telecommuting under FWA resumes and the adjustment of payment of any benefits and allowances that require the physical presence at the official duty station also resumes in accordance with ST/IC/2019/15.

## V. Performance of duties while on AWA and FWA

50. Staff members are expected to continue to demonstrate the UN values and behaviours<sup>3</sup> and to perform their assigned tasks in a satisfactory manner, as assessed by their supervisor/manager, to ensure they deliver on the work of the Organization. Supervisors/managers are responsible for clearly communicating objectives and agreed deliverables to their supervisees. Performance management obligations during AWA and FWA continue to be governed by the policy on Performance Management and Development System under [ST/AI/2021/4/Rev.1](#).
51. During periods of telecommuting outside the duty station under FWA or during periods of AWA, supervisors/managers should ensure that staff members remain engaged and connected to their teammates.
52. Upon discontinuation of AWA or suspension of FWA, staff members are expected to report to the duty station and premises, as applicable, at the specified date and time decided by the Organization. Failure to do so may result in an unauthorized absence in accordance with staff rule 5.3 (e).

## VI. Recording of FWA and AWA

53. Managers, i.e., FROs, are responsible for ensuring that staff members under their supervision record their FWA-telecommuting and AWA<sup>4</sup> days in Umoja on a regular basis and **before their certification of the monthly and annual statements**. No additional attendance records are required.

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<sup>3</sup> ST/SGB/2024/4 on [United Nations Values and Behaviours Framework](#)

<sup>4</sup> A new option named "Alternate Working Arrangement (AWA)" has been added to the drop-down menu in the time and attendance module of Umoja.

## ANNEX – Summary table of FWA and AWA

	Telecommuting under FWA	AWA
<b>Purpose</b>	To support work life balance.	To facilitate business continuity during exceptional situations, crisis, and emergencies.
<b>Scope</b>	<p>Individual</p> <p>At the duty station normally.</p> <p>Outside of the duty station for personal compelling circumstances for a limited period of time.</p>	<p>Collective or (rarely) individual.</p> <p>At the duty station for all staff members, except those requiring on-site presence.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>At the duty station with requirement to come to the workplace one or more days per week (e.g., office renovation, progressive return to the workplace, ...etc.).</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Outside the duty station but within the country for all non-programme critical personnel (e.g., security relocation with establishment of an alternative work site in a different city).</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Outside the duty station and outside the country for one or a group of individuals (e.g., staff members stranded due to air travel disruption while on official business).</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Outside the duty station and outside the country for all non-programme critical personnel (e.g., security evacuation with no alternative work site/temporary offices established).</p>

<p><b>Applicability</b></p>	<p>FWA may not be possible for some jobs and/or at certain periods of time and is subject to exigencies of service.</p> <p>FWA may be suspended or cancelled by supervisors / managers at any time due to exigencies of service or unsatisfactory performance.</p>	<p>The requirements to work remotely apply to all UN staff members requested to go on AWA.</p> <p>Only staff members whose presence on UN premises are required to physically report to the premises.</p>
<p><b>Place of telecommuting / remote working</b></p>	<p>Normally at the duty station, generally at staff members' residence.</p> <p>Under compelling circumstances, staff members can be allowed to telecommute outside the duty station for a limited period of time.</p>	<p>Normally at the duty station, generally at staff members' residence.</p> <p>If outside the duty station, it can be at a designated alternative work site, designated place of relocation or evacuation, place of home leave or any location at the choice of the staff member, depending on the situation triggering of AWA.</p>
<p><b>Duration</b></p>	<p><u>Within the duty station</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• normally a maximum of three days during the work week.</li> <li>• for staff members with compelling personal circumstances more than three days per work week.</li> </ul> <p><u>Outside the duty station</u> for staff members with compelling personal circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• normally for up to a maximum of 6 months.</li> <li>• Exceptionally for three additional months.</li> </ul> <p>The maximum period of telecommuting outside of the duty station is computed as follows: 9 months equals 195 working days; days taken as leave</p>	<p>Normally not exceeding six consecutive months.</p>

	(sick leave, AL, PL ...etc.) need to be deducted from the 195 days.	
<b>Access to UN premises</b>	<p>Offices are physically open.</p> <p>There are no limitations regarding the number of staff members that may be present on UN premises or at the duty station.</p>	<p>Offices are fully or partially physically closed but virtually open.</p> <p>When offices are fully closed, access is restricted to authorized designated staff members.</p> <p>When offices are partially closed, access is restricted to a limited number of authorized designated staff members or daily occupancy limits are put in place.</p>
<b>Initiation</b>	FWA are voluntary arrangements agreed between staff members and their supervisor / manager, subject to managers' approval when exigencies of service so allow.	<p>AWA is decided by the Organization when offices are physically closed (fully or partially) and staff members are requested to work from an alternative work site.</p> <p>This is mandatory - not optional.</p>
<b>Suspension/ discontinuation</b>	Triggered by exigencies of service or unsatisfactory performance.	Triggered by lifting of certain restrictions on premises' access, or resolution of crisis situations.
<b>Agreements</b>	<p>Prior approval is required.</p> <p>Approved FWA is incorporated into a written agreement between staff members and manager if telecommuting is for a continuous period. No written agreement is needed for one-time ad hoc arrangements.</p> <p>Managers and staff members must discuss and agree on deliverables in writing.</p>	<p>AWA is mandated by the Organization. No agreement between the manager and staff members is required but implementation of AWA must be communicated in writing to all staff members concerned.</p> <p>Managers and staff members must discuss and agree on deliverables in writing.</p>
<b>Recording</b>	Staff members are required to record their FWA days in Umoja	Staff members are required to record their AWA days in Umoja

	under the “telecommuting” option.	under the new “Alt Work Arr - AWA” option.
<b>Working hours</b>	Same number of working hours as when working from UN premises/duty station.	Same number of working hours as when working from UN premises/duty station.
<b>Associated costs</b>	No extra cost to the Organization.	Depending on the situation, as per below.
<b>Equipment</b>	Staff members telecommuting must obtain at their own expense the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions from their place of telecommuting.	<b>To the extent possible</b> , entities provide staff members with the necessary office equipment to discharge their official functions from an alternative work site.
<b>Travel and DSA</b>	No travel and DSA payable to staff members authorized to telecommute away from the duty station.	If staff members <b>are required</b> to work remotely from outside their duty station, travel to alternative work site and DSA may exceptionally be payable. If AWA are implemented in conjunction with a security relocation/evacuation, Section A of chapter VI of the security policy manual will apply instead.
<b>Payment of benefits and allowances (when outside the duty station)</b>	<p>Telecommuting outside the duty station does not constitute a change of official duty station within the meaning of staff rule 4.8 (a).</p> <p>Benefits and allowances which require physical presence at the official duty station are adjusted as per section 5 of ST/IC/2019/15.</p> <p>However, entitlements are not adjusted during periods when the staff member is on any authorized leave. In addition, the 30 days mentioned in section 5 of ST/IC/2019/5 should be counted as working days and cumulatively. Therefore, the</p>	<p>Danger pay is not payable during the period that staff members are working remotely outside the official duty station approved for danger pay.</p> <p>Accrual of qualifying service toward R&amp;R is suspended.</p> <p>For staff members who were installed at the duty station prior to AWA, all other benefits and allowances will continue to be paid in relation to the official duty station, including for exceptional situations when AWA outside of the duty station is authorized to continue beyond six months.</p>

	<p>count pauses when the staff member is on any type of approved leave, official holidays or weekends but it does not reset the clock, and the count is resumed when the staff member returns from such leave and continues to telecommute outside the duty station.</p>	<p>For staff members who were on authorized telecommuting away from the duty station prior to the implementation of AWA, payments in relation to the official duty station resume after 30 days of AWA and continue until AWA is revoked.</p>
<p><b>Medical insurance</b></p>	<p>Enrolment in medical insurance plans is made based on the official duty station. 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.</p>	<p>Enrolment in medical insurance plans is made based on the official duty station. 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.</p>
<p><b>Appendix D</b></p>	<p>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.</p> <p>All claims for compensation will be subject to the review of the UN Advisory Board on Compensation Claims (ABCC).</p> <p>Rules governing Appendix D are only applicable during the specified working hours and location that is approved in advance by the s/m's manager, and if an s/m's work location meets certain safety requirements. Please see the agreement template under ST/IC/2019/15 for conditions and safety checklist.</p>	<p>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 AWA.</p> <p>All claims for compensation will be subject to the review of the UN Advisory Board on Compensation Claims (ABCC).</p>