

Frequently Asked Questions - All Duty Stations

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

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I. FOR DUTY STATIONS WITH ALTERNATE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE (Offices are open virtually and/or physical access is restricted to a limited number of authorized personnel)

1. Personnel in my duty station have been required to work remotely on a full-time basis. What does that mean?

In an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Secretary-General (for HQ) and Heads of Entity in duty stations across the world have decided to restrict physical access to UN premises while keeping offices open virtually.

In all entities at all duty stations, where because of host country decisions and for business continuity reasons, such decisions have been made, personnel are required to work remotely, unless their physical presence in the building is required to carry out essential work. This is neither an optional nor a voluntary telecommuting arrangement between managers and staff members but a mandatory requirement by the Organization. All must comply.

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 (which can also be a UN provided accommodation) at the duty station, as an alternate working arrangement. 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. Alternate working arrangements do not require the establishment of a form or agreement. However, at the end of every week, you should ensure that telecommuting days are entered in Umoja for the days worked by selecting the 'telecommuting COVID-19' option in the drop-down menu for leave request.

In light of the adjustments to school and day care normal operations (e.g. online classes, hybrid models, reduced operating hours) and other disruptions to family

support services, the Secretary-General (for HQ) and Heads of Entities at other duty stations may decide to temporarily lift the requirement regarding core working hours, on the understanding that staff members will work for the required number of hours and continue to deliver on the assigned tasks. Managers are required to exercise maximum flexibility and staff members to be responsible and inform their managers if they cannot work full-time.

Managers are required to exercise maximum flexibility, understanding and care and adapt their demands to the impact the pandemic is having on personnel and their families. In return, personnel are expected to demonstrate maximum professionalism, solidarity with their colleagues and continue to contribute on their assigned tasks. Managers should focus on deliverables and staff should inform their managers and team members of their availability so as to facilitate coordination and effective teamwork.

Staff members who wish to be completely free of duty may avail of annual leave, uncertified sick leave if applicable and Special Leave Without Pay (SLWOP) or use them in combination with remote working based on their specific needs.

2. How do I record remote working days in Umoja under alternate working arrangements?

In Umoja Self Service, via Create Leave Request, select the leave type “Telecommuting-COVID-19” from the drop-down menu to record alternate working arrangement days. If you have already recorded standard telecommuting days, you can delete them via the Leave Overview screen and submit new records under “Telecommuting-COVID-19”. The recording can be made daily or in block on a weekly basis or for any other period of time for the days worked.

3. I cannot perform my functions remotely because I do not have the necessary equipment, or it requires my physical presence on UN premises. What does that mean for me?

If you cannot discharge your functions remotely due to the nature of your functions and have not been required to physically report to duty, your manager should temporarily assign you other functions and activities that can be undertaken remotely, such as online training and professional development as well as language training in support of multilingualism.

If you do not have an Organization-provided laptop, you are encouraged to use your private equipment during this time of crisis to help the Organization face this challenge and keep operations running as smoothly as possible. The [Quick Start Guide to](#)

[Telecommuting using Office 365](#) provides information about Office 365, OneDrive, Teams, and SharePoint Online so you can work effectively from any location, on multiple devices, and stay in touch with colleagues. The guide also contains useful information regarding preparations to work remotely.

Should none of the above be possible, you may, as a last resort, be placed on special leave with full pay (SLWFP) for a limited period of time, in which case you would not be required to exhaust your annual leave before being placed on SLWFP.

4. For how long can I work remotely away from my duty station?

AWA away from the duty station is possible provided that 1) your physical presence on UN premises is not required and will not be in the foreseeable future and 2) the nature of your functions allows for it. The duration of AWA outside the duty station depends on local conditions (i.e. it can be suspended by the head of entity if the situation improves) and is also subject to your manager's approval based on operational needs and exigencies of service. AWA outside the duty station should normally not exceed six months, heads of entity may however decide, based on specific conditions at the duty station¹ that generalized AWA outside the duty station should continue beyond six months.

Decisions regarding suspension or continuation of generalized 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.

If you choose to travel outside the duty station (i.e. you have not been required by the Organization to leave the duty station), no DSA or travel will be payable but if eligible you may be authorized to use your home leave, family visit or reverse education grant travel entitlement.

In order to ensure that you remain informed of security updates and supported by local security arrangements, irrespective of the place you are working from (i.e. within or outside the country of your duty station), we recommend that you take the following steps:

1. Update your TRIP profile
2. Request security clearance
3. Download the e-TA and enable geolocation and notifications on your phone.

You should also note the following:

- enrollment in United Nations medical plans is made based on your active duty station so visits to doctors outside of it could be considered out of network and result in additional out of pocket costs;
- the accrual of qualifying service toward rest and recuperation remains governed by the conditions established in [ST/AI/2018/10](#) on rest and recuperation;
- if you are in receipt of danger pay, payment will be suspended when you are working remotely from a location that does not qualify for this entitlement. In the context of COVID-19, all other entitlements, at this time, will continue to be paid in relation to the official duty station, including hardship and non-family allowances.

5. I am a staff member. Can I continue working remotely outside of the duty station under flexible working arrangements (FWA) after AWA outside of the duty station has ended in my duty station?

In accordance with the provisions of ST/SGB/2019/3 and ST/IC/2019/15 on the flexible working arrangements, staff members may send a request to their managers to telecommute outside of the duty station for exceptional personal compelling circumstances. Staff members are not required to return to the duty station to request FWA outside of the duty station.

6. I am a member of the personnel other than staff (e.g. consultant, UNV, intern, etc.). Can I continue working remotely outside of the duty station after AWA outside of the duty station has ended in my duty station?

This should be discussed with your manager. Non-staff personnel such as interns, UNV and consultants may be allowed to continue working remotely outside of the duty station if carrying out their functions does not require their physical presence in the premises.

7. I was on home leave/family visit travel/reverse education grant travel and the local authorities at my duty station do not allow me to enter the country of my duty station. Can I work remotely from the country I was visiting?

If feasible and compatible with your functions, you may:

- a. Work remotely from your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable; and
- b. if feasible, you might be able to report to duty at a UN Office in your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable.

8. I was encouraged by management to leave my official duty station and work from my home leave country. I lost the entitlements that require my physical presence in the duty station. Now alternate working arrangements have been implemented for all personnel at the duty station, can I be switched to alternate working arrangements?

Yes. As a matter of fairness and if at this stage of the pandemic it would be unwise or difficult for you to come back, the implementation of alternate working arrangements in your duty station will apply to you.

Payment of danger pay, where applicable, will be suspended when you are working remotely from a location that does not qualify for this entitlement, but all other entitlements will, at this time, continued to be paid in relation to your official duty station including hardship and non-family allowance.

You should also be aware of the fact that the accrual of qualifying service toward rest and recuperation remains governed by the conditions established in [ST/AI/2018/10](#) on rest and recuperation.

Further you should note that AWA outside of the official duty station can be undertaken for a limited period, normally not exceeding six months. Please refer to question 5 above for more details.

9. The phased return to the premises has started at my duty station and I was asked by my manager to physically return to work. I/someone in my household have/has a severe chronic medical condition that may place me/them in the 'at-risk' category. Can I remain at home?

If you or someone in your household are considered most vulnerable if exposed to COVID-19, you should discuss your concerns with your manager (you do not have to provide any details or share medical information). If you cannot reach an agreement with your manager regarding your on-site attendance, the following process is to be followed:

- The discussion and outcome should be clearly documented.
- You should request in writing a 'reasonable accommodation' from your manager and outline what the accommodation is – in this case, to continue to work remotely full time and state the reason - in this case 'medical reasons' or 'medical reasons relating to a household member'. No confidential information need be provided.
- You should then send your request to your supporting Medical service

Heading: "Request for reasonable accommodation – (Name), (Index number),

(Organization or department)

Body: A brief description of the situation, the actual diagnosis that prevents return to the premises, whether it is for themselves or a household dependent, recent medical report from a Doctor for the diagnosis, and what accommodation is being requested (for instance to continue telecommuting full time or work from a specific location).

A full signature block is always required with their contact details and the email address of their manager.

The local medical service will assess the case and advise the manager accordingly, without releasing confidential medical information. Based on the information, the manager will decide if the reasonable accommodation can be granted according to the requirements of reasonable accommodation requests. When denying such requests, the manager must demonstrate that it places a disproportionate or an undue burden on the Organization.

II. FOR DUTY STATIONS WHERE ALTERNATE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ARE NOT IN PLACE (i.e. offices are physically open and there are no occupancy limits in place)

10. I am reluctant to commute to work given the increase in the number of cases of COVID-19 at my duty station. Can I telecommute?

In duty stations where alternate working arrangements are not in place (i.e. offices are open physically), telecommuting may be approved for up to three days per week as per ST/SGB/2019/3. In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, provided your functions can be performed remotely, you may be authorized to exceptionally telecommute for up to five days a week in accordance with the provisions of the ST/SGB/2019/3 on flexible working arrangements. For instance, if you have a particularly long commute using public transportation and/or are have a severe chronic medical condition.

11. I was on home leave/family visit travel/reverse education grant travel and the local authorities at my duty station do not allow me to enter the country of my duty station. Can I telecommute from the country I was visiting?

If feasible and compatible with your functions, you may:

- a. be authorized to telecommute under flexible working arrangements from your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable.
- b. if feasible, you might be authorized to report to duty at a UN Office in your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable.

In such instances, personnel can be authorized to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve. All local orders given by duly constituted authorities must be respected.

12. I am feeling well and want to come to the office every day as I cannot focus on my work while at home. Can I be forced to telecommute?

It depends on the situation in the duty station. In duty stations where there is no requirement for social distancing from the host country and/or the United Nations office, although strongly recommended in order to reduce staffing footprint in UN buildings and risk of exposure during commute time, personnel cannot be forced to telecommute. Telecommuting is a voluntary agreement between staff and their managers.

Personnel are advised that in the case of emergency situations beyond their control, such as the imposition of restriction of movement by local authorities or school closures, personnel can be authorized and encouraged to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve. All local orders given by duly constituted authorities must be respected.

13. I am cohabiting with a person who has self-quarantined as a result of returning from a country/location identified by the host country/local authorities for quarantine, but I currently do not have any symptoms. Should I quarantine?

Quarantine is required after exposure or likely exposure. Until or unless the other person develops symptoms or is diagnosed, there is no need to also quarantine. If it is feasible it is a safer approach to do so, but quarantine is not required.

14. I have a severe chronic medical condition that may place me in the 'at-risk' category. Should I remain at home?

In duty stations where there is no requirement from the local authorities and/or the United Nations to work remotely on a full-time or part-time basis, UN personnel who are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or a severe underlying medical condition can be authorized to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve. Your manager and Executive Office or local human resources office need only be told that you have a serious chronic illness that makes you more at risk of a developing significant illness related to COVID-19. If you are unsure if your medical condition is considered in this category, please contact your primary health care provider for advice. In case of disagreement between you and your manager, you should contact your local Medical Service for advice and recommendation for reasonable accommodation. The medical service will assess the case and advise the manager accordingly, without releasing confidential medical information. Based on the

information, the manager will decide if the reasonable accommodation can be granted.

15. I hold a temporary appointment. Can I telecommute?

Yes, if you are a temporary appointee, you can telecommute under the same conditions as a staff member on any other type of appointment.

16. I have just returned to my duty station from a trip to a country/location affected by travel restrictions due to COVID-19. Given the health requirement by the national and local health officials, I am required to quarantine. My supervisor says I cannot work from home because of my specific responsibilities. What should I do?

You must comply with the local health requirement and stay at home and self-monitor for the required number of days following the date of your return to your duty station. Managers should exercise flexibility and accommodate with the approval of flexible work arrangements to support staff who are returning from an affected country. Please discuss alternate work assignments with your supervisor, Executive Office or your local human resources office, including online training or other professional development.

17. I have read the information that those with severe chronic medical conditions or who are over 60 years of age should work from home. While I do not meet either condition, my family member who I live with has a severe medical condition that may be complicated if exposed to the COVID-19 virus. What should I do?

If you or somebody you are living with is at increased risk for COVID-19 complications, you can be authorized to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week until the overall risk profile is considered acceptable. If you cannot work from home for any reason, please discuss the matter with your Executive Office or local human resources office including alternative arrangements such as online training or other professional development.

18. What constitutes a “severe chronic medical condition”?

The term is very broad, and it is up to you and your primary care physician to determine if working from home full-time is appropriate, based on your medical history and condition.

19. I am pregnant and do not feel safe coming into the office. What are my options?

Please discuss with your doctor and if working from home full-time is appropriate, you can be authorized to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week until the overall

risk profile is considered acceptable. If you cannot work from home for any reason, please discuss the matter with your Executive Office or local human resources office, including alternative arrangements such as online training or other professional development.

20. I would like to work from home at least the three days of the week. My supervisor, however, says I need to come into the office, but I do not feel safe. What are my options?

In duty stations where alternate working arrangements are not in effect, managers are required to implement remote working to the full extent compatible with exigencies of service in order to substantially reduce personnel exposure to transit and other crowded areas. If an individual cannot work remotely due to the specific nature of their work, their risk will still be reduced by the overall reduction in staff transiting through the building each day. In the event of questions/concerns, please bring this to the attention of your Executive Office or local human resources office so they can discuss possible options with you and your supervisor.

21. I am non-staff personnel (e.g. consultant, UNV, intern...etc.) and would like to work from home during this time period. Can I do so?

Yes, telecommuting applies to all UN personnel as long as feasible. Please discuss with your supervisor and respective Executive Office or local human resources office.

22. I have made arrangements under the provisions of the breastfeeding policy. Can I continue?

As per the [ST/SGB/2019/1](#) (Policy on breastfeeding), staff members who are nursing infants under two years of age are normally entitled to daily time off to express milk and/or breastfeed their infant during working hours. In the interest of reducing the staffing footprint in the building, and therefore reducing risk to personnel and also infants, staff members who are currently nursing infants under the provisions of [ST/SGB/2019/1](#) are encouraged to discuss telecommuting arrangements with their Executive Office or local human resources office.

23. My child's school has closed and/or is fully or partially operating on-line, and I now have to stay home. Can I telecommute?

In the case of emergency situations beyond their control, such as school closures or adjustments to normal operations (on-line classes, reduced on-site presence), personnel may be authorized to undertake full-time telecommuting for five days a week at their duty station until the situation resolves. It should be understood that arrangements for telecommuting are between personnel and their managers where it is agreed if

telecommuting is feasible given the functions to be performed as well as indication as to the deliverables to be completed on those days.

In the event that personnel need to take care of their children during part of the day, managers should exercise flexibility, understanding and care and adapt their demands to the impact the pandemic has on personnel and their families. In return, personnel are expected to demonstrate maximum professionalism, solidarity with their colleagues and continue to contribute on their assigned tasks. Managers should focus on deliverables and not overwhelm personnel with additional reporting requirements. Personnel should inform their managers and team members of their availability so as to facilitate coordination and effective teamwork. Normal procedures to notify managers of absence continue to apply.

III. OTHERS

24. I would like to better understand the difference between isolation vs quarantine. Can I still work?

In medical terms isolation refers to confinement of a person who is sick, while quarantine refers to a person who is well and free of symptoms but must be confined in order to reduce risk.

In the case where isolation as described above is required, staff members who are sick should request sick leave in accordance with established policy. In cases where personnel feel well enough to work while in isolation, they may telecommute full-time if their functions are compatible with telecommuting.

Whereas, in the case of quarantine, personnel who are free of symptoms are able to telecommute full-time if their functions allow them to do so.

25. I have small children who attend school. Schools and most kindergartens in my duty station are either closed or operating fully or partially on-line, and I have no relatives who can help me take care of my children at home. It will be challenging for me to fulfill all regular duties as established in my workplan. How can I make sure that my performance is fairly evaluated in this context?

In light of the child-care and schooling situations, closures or adjustments to normal operations (including blended/hybrid models and online remote only models on-line classes resulting in reduced or no on-site presence), and other disruptions to family support services, the requirement regarding core working hours' period is recommended to be lifted temporarily in order to afford personnel, where possible, the maximum flexibility they need in this challenging situation. Personnel continue to be expected to demonstrate maximum professionalism, solidarity with their colleagues and

continue to contribute on their assigned tasks. Managers should focus on deliverables. Managers are requested to provide full flexibility. Providing such flexibility must not be construed as underperformance.

26. Could you explain the applicability of Appendix D during telecommuting and alternate working arrangements?

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 or alternate working arrangements. All claims for compensation will be subject to the review of the UN Advisory Board on Compensation Claims (ABCC).

27. When will personnel return to normal working arrangements?

The Organization is in close contact with local authorities at each duty station and working on measures for a phased, gradual and flexible return to work in the UN premises whenever it is considered safe for personnel to do so.

Such return plans are tailored to the specific conditions of each duty station and will be closely monitored for possible adjustments.