

## United Nations Secretariat Guidance on Official Travel during the COVID-19 pandemic (19 August 2020)

1. The health and safety of UN personnel are the top priority of the Organization.
2. To limit the exposure to COVID-19, official travel should be made in accordance with national travel advisories set by the national governments and taking into consideration WHO guidelines, as applicable.
3. This Guidance complements the provisions of the UN Staff Regulations and Rules and UN Secretariat's administrative issuances such as ST/AI/2013/3 and ST/IC/2019/16 on Official travel, ST/AI/2014/2 on Daily subsistence allowance (DSA), ST/AI/2015/2/Rev.1 on Home Leave, ST/AI/2000/15 on Family visit travel, ST/AI/2018/1/Rev.1 on Education grant and related benefits (including education grant travel), ST/AI/2000/10 on Medical evacuation, ST/AI/2013/5 on Participants on advisory meetings, ST/AI/2018/4 on Medical clearances and other guidance that may have been provided on these matters.

### Alternative methods in lieu of official business travel

4. As described in section 3.2 of ST/AI/2013/3 on Official travel, when face-to-face contact is not necessary for mandate implementation, alternative methods, such as videoconference, audioconference and other remote business practices, such as virtual meetings, should be employed.
5. During the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the greatest extent possible, alternative methods should be employed in lieu of official business travel, including but not limited to virtual meetings via platforms such as MS Teams.
6. When not travelling at UN expense, the Organization shall not reimburse costs at home or elsewhere to employ such alternative methods or virtual meetings (e.g. IT equipment, Internet connection).

### Participants in advisory meetings

7. The provisions of paragraph 6 above apply to both staff members and non-staff personnel. Participants in advisory meetings shall be informed that, in order to participate in meetings to which they are invited, they must have the necessary equipment and Internet connection.
8. When a participant in an advisory meeting is unable to participate in a virtual meeting due to information technology constraints, the participant may be requested to attend the virtual meeting from another location. The following provisions shall apply:

- a. If the place of residence of the participant is within commuting distance<sup>1</sup> from the location used to attend the virtual meeting, no transportation expenses shall be reimbursable;
- b. If the place of residence is beyond commuting distance, a travel request may be approved including the payment of transportation expenses in accordance with ST/AI/2013/3 and ST/IC/2019/16 on Official travel.

9. Participants in advisory meetings who attend virtual meetings where no travel is involved shall not receive DSA.

## Consideration for official business travel during COVID-19

10. Given the circumstances related to COVID-19, when official business travel is absolutely necessary, managers are encouraged to have individual discussions with staff members about their willingness and ability to travel, taking into consideration exigencies of service, personal circumstances and risk factors for the individuals (including their family members). Managers should exercise maximum flexibility, full understanding and care during these discussions.

## Preparation before travel

11. Travelers expecting to travel on official business should ensure that their travel documentation including visa requirements for transit, destination locations and return to the duty station are valid to enable travel in accordance with government travel policies.

12. Travelers should familiarize themselves with national and local travel advisories, WHO and UN Guidelines and travel restrictions (including quarantine requirements) in their departure, arrival destinations and transit points. For example, some governments and local authorities may require recent travelers from particular destinations to show evidence of a recent negative COVID-19 test before boarding or mandate quarantine for a period of time upon arrival at destination.

13. UN personnel are reminded to update their travel profile and obtain the necessary security clearance in the website of the Department of Safety and Security (<https://trip.dss.un.org>) before any type of official travel. This will ensure that they remain informed of security updates and supported by local security arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> The commuting distance at duty stations is established by the local administrative or human resources offices taking into account the local conditions at the duty station. In New York, the reasonable commuting distance is a 50-mile radius from the United Nations Headquarters premises.

14. UN personnel are also reminded that medical clearance for travel may be required in accordance with the provisions of ST/AI/2018/4 on Medical clearances.

## Purchase of tickets

15. When travelers are authorized to purchase their own tickets through the lump-sum option, they are advised to purchase tickets that allow for changes if necessary (e.g. departure and returning dates), without incurring additional fees and/or to take out appropriate travel cancellation insurance.

## Safety measures during air travel

16. Safety measures implemented by airports and airlines are likely to vary considerably. General advice when traveling includes the following:

- Taking all regular travel precautions;
- Not traveling if symptomatic;
- Maintain physical distancing as much as possible, including avoiding queues where possible and following floor markings if provided;
- Observe hand hygiene, particularly before eating or drinking and after use of the toilet;
- Cleaning surfaces in your seat area (e.g. tray table, armrests, window shades) with disinfectant wipes;
- Limiting use of on-board services (meals, duty free, even bathrooms where possible)
- Use of face coverings/masks;
- Follow respiratory etiquette (i.e., covering of mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; use tissues and throw them away);
- Selecting a window seat if possible.

The Organization will not reimburse costs associated with taking the measures listed above.

## Standard of accommodation for air travel

17. The standard of accommodation for air travel (e.g. economy, business class) shall be established in accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/2013/3 on Official travel. Exceptions to the standard of accommodation may be approved in accordance with the provisions of section 4.8 and 4.9 of ST/AI/2013/3, which requires the submission of the form TTS.3 to USG/DMSPC.

## Quarantine expenses

18. During mandatory quarantine imposed by Governments in a mandated hotel/government facility, the Organization may reimburse actual costs for accommodation and meals in certain circumstances and for certain types of travel as described in paragraph 19 below. The reimbursement shall not exceed the mandated period of quarantine and shall be contingent upon presentation of documentation reflecting the need for mandatory quarantine and actual expenditure receipts for accommodation and/or meals. The reimbursement shall not exceed the relevant portions of the applicable DSA rate for accommodation and/or meals. If accommodation and/or meals are provided by the Government, no reimbursement shall be made.

19. Subject to a review on a case-by-case basis, reimbursement of mandatory quarantine expenses may exceptionally be made as a miscellaneous travel expense under staff rule 7.11 in the following circumstances and types of authorized official travel:

- Return from official business travel (where DSA is no longer applicable);
- R and R travel to the designated R and R destination (including return travel)<sup>2</sup>;
- Upon return to the duty station, following R and R travel to a destination other than the designated R and R destination;
- Organization-paid travel to place of residence/home leave under scenario 1 (b) of the Human Resources Network's Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations (Field Group) Guidance Note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020 (including return travel);
- Upon return to the duty station, following Organization-paid travel to another authorized location (other than place of residence/home leave) under 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;
- Medical evacuation to the authorized destination under sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of ST/AI/2010/10 on Medical evacuation (if not hospitalized) and upon return to the duty station irrespective of where the travel took place;
- Travel on separation to the place of recruitment or place of home leave, as applicable.

20. Reimbursement of mandatory quarantine expenses under paragraph 19 above must be properly justified with the necessary details pertaining to each case, recorded with specific reasons related to COVID-19 and reported to the Business Transformation and Accountability Division (BTAD)/DMSPC in accordance with normal practice governing exceptions.

21. Additionally, in the following circumstances, quarantine expenses are not reimbursable because they are already covered by DSA or the DSA portion of settling-in-grant, as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> The country team should take into account the suitability of locations including if they are subject to quarantine requirements and reasonable expectations that the staff members will be able to return to the duty station at the end of the R and R travel when they decide on the designation of R and R destinations.

- During official business travel<sup>3</sup>;
- Travel on appointment, assignment or change of duty station.

22. Quarantine expenses shall not be reimbursable in the following cases, irrespective of whether the quarantine is in a mandated government facility:

- Home leave, family visit or education grant travel (in all cases i.e., when the ticket is purchased by the Organization or when the lump-sum option has been selected);
- R and R to a destination other than the designated R and R destination (except as provided in paragraph 19);
- Organization-paid travel to another authorized location (other than place of residence/home leave) under scenario 1 (b) of the guidance note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020 (except as provided in paragraph 19 upon return to the duty station);
- Medical evacuation to an alternative place of evacuation chosen by the staff member under section 5.5 of ST/AI/2000/10 on Medical evacuation (except as provided in paragraph 19 upon return to the duty station);
- Personal travel not at the expense of the Organization (e.g., staff members purchasing their own tickets to go on annual leave);
- Cases where travelers are required to quarantine at any place, including their homes, but they elect not to stay in their own home as a personal choice.

## COVID-19 testing/certificate expenses

23. When COVID-19 testing/certificate is mandatory for travel by a government, airline, airport or the United Nations (upon arrival at the destination or return), subject to a case-by-case review, and presentation of documentation reflecting the need for mandatory testing and receipts, the Organization may reimburse the actual expenses of the COVID-19 testing as long as they are not reimbursable by medical insurance schemes or other arrangements, for staff, their eligible family members and non-staff personnel, in the following cases of authorized official travel:

- Official business travel (including return from official business travel);
- Travel on appointment, assignment, change of duty station or separation;
- Home leave, family visit or education grant travel for staff members and eligible family members (when the ticket is purchased by the Organization);
- R and R travel to the designated R and R destination (including return travel);

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<sup>3</sup> When making decisions on official business travel, the Heads of Entities should take into account the suitability of the travel destination including if they are subject to quarantine requirements and reasonable expectations that the staff members will be able to effectively perform their duties upon arrival at the destination as well as to return to their official duty station.

- Organization-paid travel to place of residence/home leave under 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 (including return travel);
- Upon return to the duty station, organization-paid travel to another authorized location (other than place of residence/home leave) under 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;
- Medical evacuation to the authorized destination under sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of ST/AI/2010/10 on Medical evacuation and upon return to the duty station irrespective of where the travel took place.

24. Reimbursement of COVID-19 testing/certificate expenses under paragraph 23 above must be properly justified with the necessary details pertaining to each case, recorded with specific reasons related to COVID-19 and reported to the Business Transformation and Accountability Division (BTAD)/DMSPC in accordance with normal practice governing exceptions.

25. COVID-19 testing is not reimbursable when the testing is voluntary. It is also not reimbursable for personal travel not at the expense of the Organization.

## Travelling by private motor vehicle

26. Staff members and UN personnel may prefer and request to travel by private motor vehicle instead of by air. In instances where the Organization provides authorization for travel by a private motor vehicle, the total reimbursable amount that may be claimed in respect of a particular journey shall be limited to the maximum travel expenses to which the traveler would have been entitled under the approved route, mode of transportation and standard of accommodation. The maximum travel expenses for this purpose shall be calculated in accordance with section 8.3 of ST/AI/2013/3 on Official travel.

## Terminal expenses

27. Terminal expenses shall be calculated and paid in accordance with ST/AI/2013/3 and ST/IC/2019/6 on Official travel. No adjustments to terminal expenses shall be made.

## Hotels/accommodation

28. In accordance with criteria established by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), the calculation of standard DSA rates takes into consideration the cost of a room at good commercial hotels frequently used by the United Nations. These good commercial hotels normally maintain a fairly high standard of cleanliness and sanitary conditions. UN personnel are encouraged to stay in these hotels.

## Home leave, family visit and education grant travel

29. The Organization acknowledges the importance of taking leave and visiting family during these times. Staff members may take advantage of home leave, family visit or education grant travel if eligible, taking into consideration travel advisories at departure, arrival and transit points.

30. Staff members may telecommute or work remotely when travelling on home leave, family visit or education grant travel. However, they will be required to take at least five (5) days of annual leave during the period of travel. Telecommuting or remote work may be particularly appropriate and encouraged when staff members are required to quarantine.

31. Considering possible travel restrictions to the country of home leave, staff members may request and be authorized to travel to a country other than the country of home leave in accordance with section 8.1 of ST/AI/2015/2/Rev.1 on Home leave. The amount of travel and transportation expenses borne by the Organization shall not exceed the cost of travel to the place of home leave.

32. The expected service requirements to exercise home leave or family visit travel as per staff rule 5.2 (b) (ii) and (l) (i) and section 3.1 of ST/AI/2015/2/Rev.1 and section 2.3 of ST/AI/2000/15 on Family visit travel shall continue to apply. The minimum intervals between home leave, family visit and education grant travel as per staff rule 5.2 (b) (iii), (f) and (l) (ii) shall also continue to apply.

## Return travel to duty station

33. Staff members who travel out of the duty station (on home leave, family visit, education grant travel or at their own expense) shall return to the duty station using the same type of travel. The Organization shall not bear the cost for return ticket costs of staff members who departed the duty station at their own expense.

## Annex - Reimbursement of mandatory quarantine expenses and mandatory COVID-19 testing/certificate<sup>4</sup>

<b>Type of travel</b>	<b>Mandatory quarantine expenses reimbursed</b>	<b>Mandatory COVID-19 testing/certificate<sup>5</sup> expenses reimbursed</b>
Official business travel	Yes (covered by DSA)	Yes
Return from official business travel	Yes	Yes
Travel on appointment, assignment or change of duty station <sup>6</sup>	No (covered by the DSA portion of settling-in-grant)	Yes
Travel on separation	Yes	Yes
Travel on home leave, family visit or education grant travel (when the ticket is purchased by the Organization)	No	Yes
Travel on home leave, family visit or education grant travel (when the lump-sum option is selected)	No	No
R and R travel to the designated R and R destination	Yes	Yes
R and R travel to a to a destination other than the designated R and R destination	No (except upon return to the duty station)	No (except upon return to the duty station)
Organization-paid travel to place of residence/home leave under scenario 1 (b) of Field Group guidance note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020	Yes	Yes
Organization-paid travel to another authorized location (other than place of residence/home leave) under scenario 1 (b) of the guidance note for R and R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions dated 1 June 2020	No (except upon return to the duty station)	No (except upon return to the duty station)
Medical evacuation to the authorized destination under sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of ST/AI/2010/10 on Medical evacuation	Yes (if not hospitalized)	Yes
Medical evacuation to an alternative place of evacuation chosen by the staff member under section 5.5 of ST/AI/2000/10 on Medical evacuation	No (except upon return to the duty station)	No (except upon return to the duty station)
Personal travel not at the expense of the Organization (e.g., staff members purchasing their own tickets to go on annual leave)	No	No

<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to paragraph 18 of this Guidance.

<sup>5</sup> When not covered by medical insurance schemes or other arrangements.