

Guidance Note

Options for R&R duty stations with COVID-19 travel restrictions

(Version 4.0 – 1 June 2020)

In light of COVID-19 travel restrictions, many countries have imposed travel restrictions and quarantine requirements. In addition to limited travel options, the likelihood of being stranded in transit is high, possibly leaving operations without the required personnel to function. It will also be important to reserve increasingly limited travel capacity for operational and medical priorities. Given that travel seriously increases the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19, an important step in mitigating and reducing this risk is to minimize all travel, including travel related to Rest and Recuperation (R&R). However, as the situation continues to confine staff members to their duty stations, it is critical that additional flexibility be allowed to provide the possibility for staff to get a break from the duty station and to avail of a period of rest and recuperation.

At present, over 90% of duty stations with R&R destinations outside the country have no or limited flight options and are subject to quarantine periods. The HR Network Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations (Field Group) requests Resident Coordinators, in consultation with focal points of the UN Country teams (UNCT) in duty stations entitled to R&R to follow the R&R implementation scenarios below. UNCTs should take into account public health issues locally and maintain their operational business continuity, where possible, as well as harmonising the R&R measures across UN entities present in the duty station.

Scenario I: Duty stations where travel restrictions on movement internally, as well as entering and exiting the country, are in effect.

Action recommended:

The Resident Coordinator upon recommendation from the UNCT is requested to apply the two following options, depending on the operational realities of organizations present in the duty station, with a view of harmonizing the measures.

Option I (a) Additional days of Special leave with full pay (SLWFP) for missed R&R cycles

Under this option, the R&R framework remains in place, however due to travel restrictions staff members who have one or more R&R travels deferred will be credited 5 days of SLWFP for each deferred travel, up to a maximum of 15 days of SLWFP. The SLWFP can be taken in conjunction with R&R travel once the conditions allow R&R to resume. When R&R travel can be resumed, organizations should allow travel in a phased approach with a view to maintain operational capacity. The accrued days of SLWFP **may** be taken in conjunction with other types of absence subject to the exigencies of service.

For R&R already approved but not initiated, the travel lump-sum will not be recovered and should be used for the next R&R with necessary adjustments if the staff member provides evidence of having already bought a plane ticket and cannot recover the expenditure or make changes.

Option I (b) Organization-paid travel to place of residence/home leave or another authorized location

Under this option, a longer period is spent outside the duty station to ensure that staff are able to recuperate, instead of availing of R&R on a periodic basis. This option is dependent on UNCT capacity to rotate staff in and out of the duty station for established periods. The length of the rotation cycle will have to include the possibility that the staff member may be subject to quarantine measures upon arrival at the location of travel and/or upon return to the duty station. Staff members travel out of the duty station for longer periods of time (e.g. 1.5 to 3 months) and are sent to their place of residence/home leave.

Travel under this option will consist of a roundtrip ticket provided by the organization (economy class), and no DSA will be payable in the place of residence/home leave. Planning would be subject to availability of transportation for the full itinerary. No lumpsum is payable under this option. In case of unexpected delays or forced stopovers or compulsory quarantine on the authorized itinerary, staff members may be reimbursed for the actual costs for meal and accommodation not exceeding the corresponding portions of the established DSA rate for the location where staff member is delayed.

Where a staff member is exceptionally authorized to travel to another location, the cost of the travel to be borne by the Organizations may not exceed the costs of travel to the place of residence/ home leave.

Scenario II: Duty stations where full or partial travel restrictions in entering and exiting the country, to and from the approved R&R destination, are in effect but internal movement is permitted.

Action recommended:

The Resident Coordinator in consultation with the UNCT is requested to allow R&R to be exercised within the country, normally in the capital city where family restrictions do not apply. Lump-sum amounts, where applicable, are to be adjusted accordingly. Where the R&R cannot be exercised within the country, Scenario I should apply. Temporary changes to the R&R destination and revised lump-sum amounts must be reported to the Field Group using the email addresses provided below.

Scenario III: Duty stations where there are no travel restrictions entering or exiting the country.

Action recommended:

Rest and recuperation will only be allowed in designated R&R duty stations where no restrictions are in place. Should a staff member be prevented from returning following R&R travel to the designated R&R duty station, the staff member will be considered on travel status and eligible for payment of DSA for the designated R&R duty station.

A staff member wishing to exercise their R&R in a location other than the designated duty station must obtain prior approval from their head of entity. The Resident Coordinator, together

with the UNCT , should establish common criteria by which to evaluate the suitability of locations other than the designated R&R duty station, such as whether the location is subject to quarantine requirements and there is a reasonable expectation that the staff member is able to return to the duty station at the end of the R&R travel, to guide the head of entity in decision making.

Staff members travelling to another location if placed in quarantine or prevented from resuming service, will not be eligible for payment of DSA.

Should the currently approved R&R destination be in a country affected by COVID-19, where return to the duty station may be restricted, the UNCT should identify and obtain from the Field Group, endorsement of an alternate destination.

Under all scenarios except scenario I(b), a staff member may, **on a voluntary basis**, decide to postpone R&R travel. Staff members who defers one or more R&R travels will be allowed to avail themselves of up to 15 days of SLWFP, as applicable.

Under all scenarios except scenario I(b): When R&R travel is deferred staff members can benefit from up to five consecutive days of SLWFP at the duty station within 30 calendar days following completion of each applicable qualifying service (i.e. 4, 6, 8 or 12 weeks). Resident Coordinators and country teams should understand that the options are temporary and are limited to responding to the COVID-19 restrictions. The UNCT would decide when to activate the selected options and when to revert back to the normal R&R framework. In addition, the UNCT should continue to evaluate whether any alternate destinations are suitable for R&R and obtain from the Field Group, endorsement of an alternate destination.

Reporting requirements: The UNCT, through the RC, should inform the Acting Chairperson of the Field Group of adjustments made in accordance with the guidance above by writing to:

Mr. James Hanneman, Acting Chairperson, Human Resources Network Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations (Field Group) at james.hanneman@undp.org, with copies to:

Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, United Nations Secretariat and Co-Chair of the HR Network at lopez22@un.org;

Mr. David Bearfield, Director, OHR, UNDP and Co-Chair of the HR Network at David.Bearfield@undp.org; and

Mr. Andrew Villanueva, HR Analyst, OHR, UNDP at Andrew.Villanueva@undp.org.

This Guidance Note will be updated as the situation brought about by COVID-19 evolves.