

Flexible
Working
Arrangements
at the United
Nations



October 2009

Survey Report

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted by the Office of the Special Adviser on the Advancement of Women and Gender Issues (OSAGI) in July–August 2009. The survey was designed to collect information on the use of flexible working arrangements among United Nations Secretariat staff, with a broader aim of identifying current practices and emerging practices regarding work/life fit in the organization.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	#
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	#
CHAPTER 2: KNOWLEDGE OF FLEXIBLE WORK POLICIES	#
CHAPTER 3: ACCESS TO INFORMATION, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS	#
3.1 – INTRANET “ISEEK”	#
3.2 – OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION	#
3.3 – APPLICATION PROCEDURES	#
CHAPTER 4: INTEREST IN FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	#

4.1 – OPINION ABOUT FLEXIBLE WORK	#
4.2 – INTEREST IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS	#
CHAPTER 5: REQUEST OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	#
5.1 – FLEXIBLE WORK PROPOSAL	#
5.2 – OBSTACLES TO REQUEST	#
5.3 – MOTIVATIONS FOR REQUEST	#
CHAPTER 6: USE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	#
6.1 – FLEXIBLE WORK APPROVAL	#
6.2 – SATISFACTION WITH FLEXIBLE WORK OPTION(S)	#
6.3 – OUTCOME OF FLEXIBLE WORK USE	#
6.4 – PERCEPTION OF SUPPORT	#
CHAPTER 7: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM SUPERVISORS	#
CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS	#
APPENDIXES	#

Executive Summary

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Advancement of Women and Gender Issues (OSAGI) conducted a survey on the UN Secretariat intranet *iSeek* in July–August 2009. The purpose of the survey was to identify areas for further improvement in the use and implementation of flexible work arrangement policies. In addition, to further managerial and departmental accountability, the Secretary–General, through a Policy Committee Decision, has required that each Department and Office of the United Nations Secretariat report on gender–related issues, including those of improved work/life fit, through gender–balance scorecards. The results of this survey, therefore, will feed into these scorecards.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. Overall, UN staff members are not aware of the basic provisions of existing flexible working arrangements policies.
 - A majority of staff reported having poor or very poor knowledge of the policies on scheduled break for external learning activities (50 per cent), telecommuting (49 per cent), compressed work schedule (39 per cent), and staggered working hours (38 per cent).
2. Staff members are not well informed about the availability of flexible working arrangements options at the UN.
 - Most staff (56 per cent) admitted that they had not used the information provided on *iSeek* on FWA policies and guidelines. They had not done so mainly because they did not know that such information was available on *iSeek* and where in the website it could be found.

- While 45 per cent of staff members have not received any information about flexible working arrangements options, most of those who have been provided with information received it from their colleagues (22 per cent) or immediate supervisors (16 per cent).

3. Staff opinion about flexible working arrangements is predominantly positive.

- A large majority of staff (67 per cent) agreed that flexible work arrangements are simply a modern tool to allow persons to retain their productivity while increasing their flexibility in choosing a work method more compatible to their work life fit.
- Most staff members (57 per cent) understood that flexible work arrangements should be available to all persons irrespective of their situation if it maintains or increases productivity and work life fit/balance.
- A lesser majority (42 per cent) expressed that flexible work arrangements are for those who are responsible and will work anywhere to fulfill the needs of their job.

4. There is a very strong interest in using flexible working arrangements among UN staff.

- A high percentage of staff admitted being interested in using compressed work schedule (74 per cent), telecommuting (73 per cent), staggered working hours (72 per cent), and scheduled break for external learning activities (68 per cent).

5. Only a minority of staff members have actually requested the use of flexible working arrangements.

- More than half of survey respondents have not proposed (informally or formally) any flexible working arrangements options during the past two years.
- A small number of staff have proposed scheduled break for external learning activity (5 per cent), staggered working hours (17 per cent), telecommuting (17 per cent), and compressed work schedule (17 per cent).

6. The approval rate for flexible working arrangements requests differs by option.

- 61 per cent of the respondents who had requested staggered working hours and 54 per cent of those who had requested compressed work schedule were approved.
- However, fewer staff members were approved when it came to telecommuting (48 per cent) and scheduled break for external learning activity (32 per cent).

7. Staff members that were approved for flexible working arrangements have a high level of satisfaction with the option they had chosen.

- A large majority of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with staggered working hours (84 per cent), scheduled break for external learning activity (76 per cent), telecommuting (71 per cent), and compressed work schedule (70 per cent).

8. The use of flexible working arrangements has a significant impact on staff productivity, job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment.

- Most staff members admitted that as an outcome of taking a flexible working arrangement option, they are working smarter and better (69 per cent) and they are more satisfied with their job (67 per cent).

- Many staff members also agreed that using a flexible arrangement option has increased their motivation (65 per cent) and their desire to stay at UN (64 per cent).

9. Support for the use of flexible working arrangements is perceived as low in departments.

- Only a small percentage of staff members perceived senior management (20 per cent), the Executive Office (21 per cent) and middle management (27 per cent) as supportive or very supportive towards the use of flexible working arrangements in their departments.
- Nevertheless, 42 per cent of staff members perceived that their colleagues were supportive or very supportive.

10. Supervisors have difficulty to promote the use of flexible working arrangements in their departments.

- Most supervisors reported having poor or very poor knowledge on existing policies related to scheduled break for external learning activities (45 per cent) and telecommuting (43 per cent).
- While 45 per cent of supervisors have encouraged the use of flexible working arrangements informally, 30 per cent have not taken any action due to lack of information about such options and lack of support from senior management.

CALL FOR ACTION

Based on the main findings of the survey and the suggestions offered by respondents, we recommend the following actions, to be considered by senior leadership and management in particular.

1. **Raise awareness about the availability of flexible working arrangements.**
Most staff members do not know that such opportunity is available to

them. Even supervisors are not all aware of the existence of flexible working arrangements policies. Suggestions thus include making the information about flexible working arrangements on iSeek more apparent and circulating the Secretary-General's bulletin on Flexible Working Arrangements ([ST/SGB/2003/4](#)) by email and in offices.

2. **Make the use of flexible working arrangements a strategic priority.** Survey results show that staff members using flexible working arrangements are more productive, more satisfied with their job, and more motivated. Making the use of these flexible working arrangements a strategic priority means taking the time to better understand the challenges and aspirations of staff in order to develop a needs-focused flexible working arrangements system and ultimately improve staff effectiveness as a whole.

3. **Demonstrate support and commitment to the use of flexible working arrangements.** Demonstrated support and commitment from top management and senior leadership is crucial for supervisors to be able to fully implement the use of flexible working arrangements in their departments. Management's open support of flexible working arrangements can also have a positive impact on staff commitment to the organization.

Chapter 1: Introduction

BACKGROUND

Flexible working arrangements have been authorized in all Departments and Offices of the United Nations Secretariat since 1 February 2003 as announced by the Secretary-General on 24 January 2003 ([ST/SGB/2003/4](#)). These work-life policies were introduced in the Secretariat with the purpose of helping the staff to blend their work and personal lives in a healthy and balanced way.

In his letter to the Heads of Departments and Offices (*Interoffice memorandum* of 3 April 2008), the Secretary-General also pointed out that flexible working arrangements are a key tool for achieving gender balance, and endorsed the development of a twice-a-year “gender balance scorecard” for each department of the Secretariat (*Policy Committee decision* 2008/8 of February 12, 2008) that would comprise a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including indicators on the use of flexible working arrangements.

THE SURVEY

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Advancement of Women and Gender Issues (OSAGI) has thus designed a survey to be conducted bi-annually in order to gather up-to-date information on the use of flexible working arrangements in the Secretariat. The survey was put on the Office of Human Resources Management’s “Enterprise Feedback Management System” platform and a link to the survey was posted on the Secretariat intranet *iSeek* from the end of July to mid August 2009. Responses were collected over a period of 2 months (21 July to 22 September 2009). The survey received a total of 2439 responses, out of which 2082 fully completed responses were utilized for this report.

The online questionnaire was divided in several parts, namely:

- policy knowledge assessment
- interest in use of FWA¹
- past or current use of FWA
- reasons for use/non-use of FWA
- satisfaction with FWA use
- consequences of FWA use
- suggestions for improvement of FWA implementation
- use of other flexibility measures
- perception of support of FWA
- information, resources, and tools
- additional questions for staff with supervisory functions

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The representative sample of 2082 respondents is made up of 1392 women (67 per cent) and 690 men (33 per cent). Forty-four percent of respondents are between 41 and 55 years old, 39 per cent are between 31 and 40, 9 per cent are over 56, and 7 per cent are under 30. Most respondents are at the Professional level (51 per cent). Thirty-seven per cent of respondents are in the General Service category and 3 per cent are at the Director level and above (D1 to USG). Thirty-eight per cent of survey respondents had supervisory functions.

Most respondents are married (60 per cent). Twenty-seven per cent are single, 9 per cent are divorced, separated or widowed, and 5 per cent have a common law partner. The majority of respondents have no dependents (41 per cent). Twenty-five per cent have children from 4 to 10 years old, 18 per cent have children of 3 or less, 12 per cent have children from 14 to 18, 7 per cent have elderly parents, 2 per cent have children with disability, and 1 per cent have a spouse with disability. Nine per cent of respondents declared having other

¹ FWA: Flexible working arrangements.

dependents such as spouse with no or low income, college aged children, and relatives with disability.

Survey respondents represent 36 Departments and Offices of the UN Secretariat, and 17 Missions (See complete list in Appendixes 1 & 2). Among those, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is represented by 205 respondents (10 per cent), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is represented by 151 respondents (7 per cent), and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) is represented by 144 respondents (7 per cent).

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Once the survey data collected, statistical analysis was performed through the SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences – Version 17). Frequencies were run for each item of the questionnaire in order to determine the most common responses and identify general trends. Where relevant, the survey analysis includes findings by gender (men and women), marital status (living with a partner and living alone), dependents (with dependents and without dependents) or professional category (General Service, Professional level, and Director level and above). Chi-square tests were conducted in order to test for the significance of the differences by gender, marital status, dependents, and professional category. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was the criterion for statistically significant results.

Chapter 2: Knowledge of flexible work policies

As explained in the Secretary-General's Bulletin ([ST/SGB/2003/4](#)), the options under flexible working arrangements are *staggered working hours*, *compressed work schedule* (ten working days in nine), *scheduled break for external learning activities*, and *work away from the office* (telecommuting).

Staggered working hours

Under this option, staff members are expected to be present during a core period of the working day. The core period will be set at each duty station. Staff must complete the balance of working hours for each day before, after, or partly before and partly after, the core period.

Compressed work schedule: ten working days in nine

Under this option, all the hours that would normally have been worked during a period of ten working days are compressed into nine working days by distributing among these nine days the hours that would otherwise have been worked on the tenth day. This redistribution of normal working hours allows staff members, every other week, to take off the last day of the normal work week.

Scheduled break for external learning activities

Staff members wishing to attend courses relevant to their professional development at universities or other institutions of learning may request breaks of up to three hours per day for a maximum of two days per week. The hours

spent away from work during a particular week must be made up during that week.

Work away from the office (telecommuting)

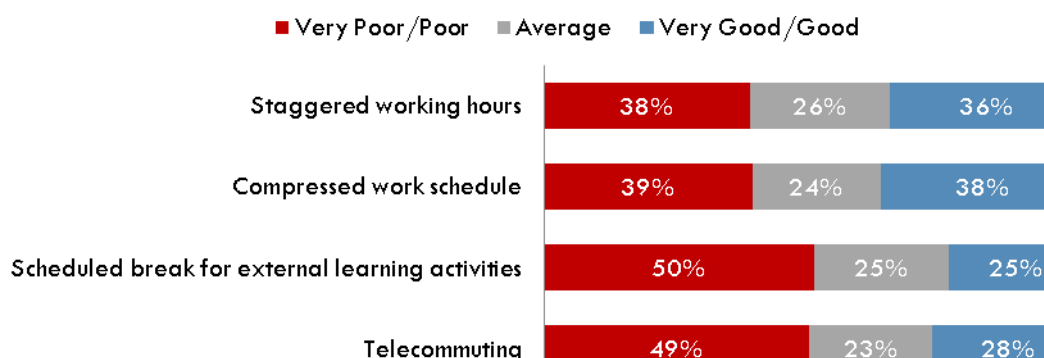
Where consistent with the nature of the work involved, staff members may spend up to two days per week working from an alternative work site, provided they have access to the necessary equipment and may always be reached by telephone or e-mail.

POLICY KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

When asked to rate their knowledge of the basic provisions of the above policies, most respondents reported that they have very poor or poor knowledge of staggered working hours (38 per cent), compressed work schedule (39 per cent), scheduled break for external learning activities (50 per cent), and telecommuting (49 per cent). These percentages also show that respondents have poorer knowledge of *scheduled break for external learning activities* and *telecommuting* than *staggered working hours* and *compressed work schedule*. More investigation is however needed in order to determine why staff knowledge of flexible work policies varies by option.

Q.3 - The UN has a number of policies intended to support staff in achieving greater work-life balance (covered in the Secretary-General's bulletin on Flexible Working Arrangements - [ST/SGB/2003/4](#)). How would you rate your knowledge of the basic provisions of the following policies?

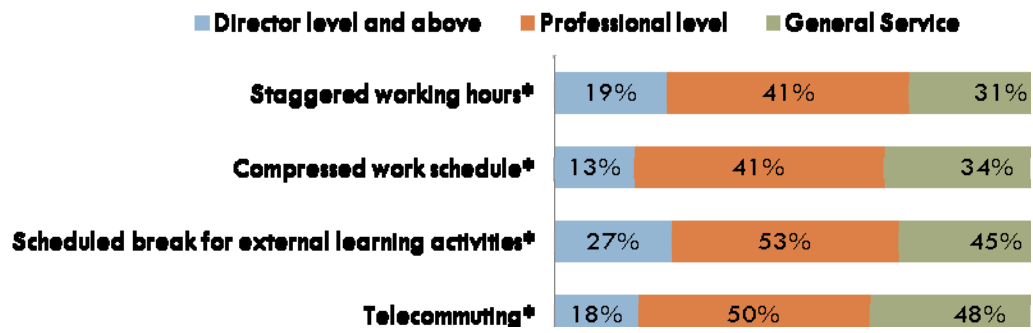
Percentage of respondents



Further analysis by professional category revealed significant differences among the respondents who admitted having very poor or poor knowledge of the flexible work policies. Indeed, more respondents at the Professional level had very poor or poor knowledge of the policies as compared to those in the General Service and those at the Director level and above. Also, only a small proportion of the respondents at the Director level and above had very poor or poor knowledge of staggered working hours (19 per cent), compressed work schedule (13 per cent), scheduled break for external learning activities (27 per cent), and telecommuting (18 per cent). Thus staff awareness of flexible work policies is currently not consistent across professional categories, with knowledge mainly concentrated at higher levels.

Proportion of respondents who have very poor/poor knowledge of flexible work policies

Total <100% because other professional categories were not included



* p=.00

Chapter 3: Information, resources, and tools

INTRANET ISEEK

A majority of respondents (56 per cent) reported that they **had not made use of the information provided on iSeek on flexible working arrangements policies and guidelines**. When prompted to explain why they had not done so, most respondents answered that they could not locate the information on iSeek. Some respondents reported that they were aware of the flexible work policies but were not able to make use of them because of obstacles such as restrictions on the use of flexible working arrangements in department/division/office, flexible work not relevant to job type or professional category, and lack of support from supervisors.

I understand it all depends on the policies of the department and ours is not supportive of flexible working arrangements.

-- Female TC staff member

I have been advised that this does not apply to Msn appointees.

-- Male Professional supervisor

FWA were discouraged by successive supervisors since 2005.

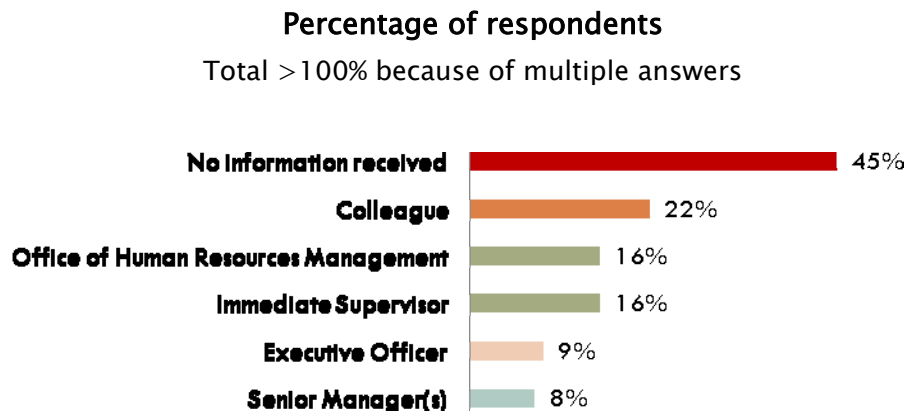
-- Female Director

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

When asked if they had received any information about the availability of flexible work options from other sources, a majority of respondents (45 per cent) reported that they had received no information about these options. However, some respondents have received it from their colleagues (22 per

cent), their immediate supervisors (16 per cent) or the Office of Human Resources Management (16 per cent).

Q.6 – Have the following people provided any information about the availability of FWA options to you? Please check all that apply.



APPLICATION PROCEDURES

When asked whether they found the application procedures for flexible working arrangements reasonable, most respondents (47 per cent) admitted that they found the procedures reasonable. However, analysis by gender showed that most male respondents found the procedures unreasonable. Indeed, 53 per cent of male respondents reported that the procedures were not reasonable as compared to 46 per cent of female respondents.

Proportion of respondents who found the application procedures unreasonable (By gender*)



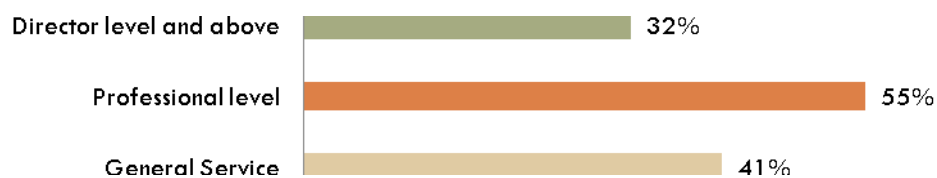
*p<.05

I think there is less use by male staff members and the FWA are seen as a female/mother issue.

-- Male Professional supervisor

Analysis by professional category revealed that respondents at the Professional level were more likely to find the procedures unreasonable. Fifty-five per cent of respondents at the Professional level reported that the application procedures were not reasonable as compared to 41 per cent of respondents in the General Service and 32 per cent of those at the Director level and above.

Proportion of respondents who found the application procedures unreasonable (By category*)



*p=.00

I was told not to bother applying for FWA. D2 is not willing to consider under any circumstances.

-- Female Professional staff member

Issues with the application procedures

Respondents were asked to explain why they did not find the application procedures for flexible working arrangements reasonable. Out of the 652 respondents that provided an explanation, 67 per cent admitted that they were not aware of the existence of such procedures. Other respondents pointed out the following issues:

- The involvement of senior staff in the approval process complicates the procedures.

Too many layers of approval needed. My supervisor knows my work and should be able to approve without involvement of more senior staff.

-- Female Professional staff

The request can be rejected even if the immediate supervisors approve it.

-- Female Professional staff

- Flexible working arrangements are not implemented equally in Departments and Offices.

Inconsistent application of FWA across the system, within Offices and Branches. Too dependent on the inclinations and dare I say whims of managers.

-- Female Professional supervisor

Although I understand the needs of each duty station must be taken into account, without mandating the locally relevant application of FWA, traditional leaders resistant to change within the organization will always be able to refuse to apply them.

-- Male Professional staff

- Application success depends heavily on manager and supervisor biases.

Rather cumbersome; you are completely dependent on your supervisor, who regards FWA as a favour to grant to those he considers worthy.

-- Female Professional staff

It is quite a struggle to convince supervisors (especially when they have no children themselves...a common case in the UN) that they allow you to telecommute once a week.

-- Female Professional supervisor

- The provisions of current flexible work policies are actually not flexible per se.

Too structured to be considered flexible. The word 'flexible' should mean just that, so that for a 9 - 5 schedule someone should be able to come in a late and make up the time at the end of the day.

-- Female GS staff member

The FWA are not really flexible, instead they are very very rigid. I find staggered working hours most useful, but there should be more flexibility to compensate the hours rather than on the same day.

-- Male Professional supervisor

- Current flexible work procedures and policies do not take job realities into account.

The forms are very restrictive and do not always reflect the realities of our work situations.

-- Male Professional supervisor

Does not benefit staff performing administrative duties.

-- Female GS staff member

Chapter 4: Interest in flexible working arrangements

OPINION ABOUT FLEXIBLE WORK

When prompted to check which general statements about flexible working arrangements they agreed with, a majority of respondents chose the most positive statements. We thus conclude that respondents have a positive opinion about flexible working arrangements.

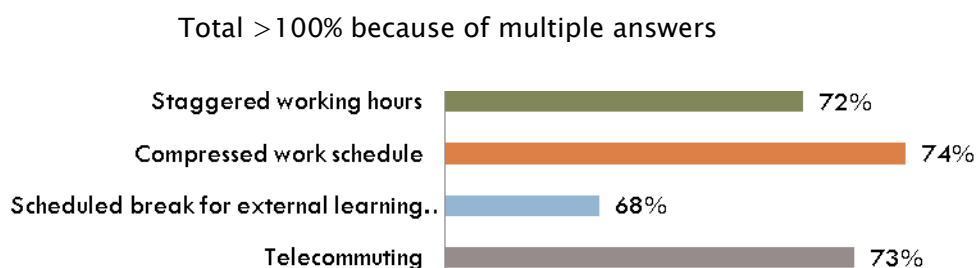
- A large majority of respondents (67 per cent) agreed that flexible working arrangements are simply a modern tool to allow persons to retain their productivity, while increasing their flexibility in choosing a work method more compatible to their work life fit.
- Most respondents (57 per cent) understood that flexible working arrangements should be available to all persons irrespective of their situation if it maintains or increases productivity and work life fit/balance.
- A lesser majority (42 per cent) are of the view that flexible working arrangements are suitable only for staff with a strong sense of responsibility.

By contrast, only a minority of respondents agreed with the following **statements**: flexible work arrangements are designed only for those with children (7 per cent), flexible work arrangements are designed only for those with elderly parents (4 per cent), only lazy workers apply for flexible work arrangements (1 per cent), and only workaholics who want to work all day and night apply for flexible work arrangements (1 per cent).

INTEREST IN FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS

Respondents demonstrated a strong interest in using flexible working arrangements. Indeed, a large majority of respondents admitted that they were very interested or interested in using compressed work schedule (74 per cent), telecommuting (73 per cent), staggered working hours (72 per cent), and scheduled break for external learning activities (68 per cent). Although these percentages are all high, we can notice that the flexible work options that interest respondents most are *compressed work schedule* and *telecommuting*.

Proportion of respondents who are very interested/interested in using the following options



Interest in staggered working hours

By dependents (p<.05): Staff members with dependents have a stronger interest in staggered working hours than those who have no dependents. Indeed, 82 per cent of respondents with dependents were very interested or interested in this option as compared to 77 per cent of those without dependents.

By professional category (p<.05): Staff members in the General Service are more interested in staggered working hours than staff at the Professional level or at the Director level and above. Analysis by professional category shows in effect that 82 per cent of General Service respondents, 80 per cent of Professional level respondents, and 71 per cent of respondents at the Director level and above were very interested or interested in this option.

Interest in compressed work schedule

By professional category (p<.05): Staff members in the General Service and at the Professional level have a stronger interest in compressed work schedule than those at the Director level and above. Indeed, 83 per cent of General Service respondents and 83 per cent of Professional level respondents reported being very interested or interested in this option as compared to 74 per cent of respondents at the Director level and above.

Interest in scheduled break for external learning activities

By marital status (p<.05): Staff members who are living alone (never married, divorced, separated or widowed) are more interested in scheduled break for external learning activities than those are living with a partner (married or common law partner). In effect, 79 per cent of respondents without a partner and 75 per cent of those with a partner admitted being very interested or interested in this option.

By professional category (p=.00): Staff members at the Professional level have a stronger interest in scheduled break for external learning activities than those in the General Service and at the Director level and above. While 78 per cent of Professional level respondents reported being very interested or interested in this option, a lesser majority demonstrated their interest among respondents in the General Service (74 per cent) and among those at the Director level and above (63 per cent).

Interest in telecommuting

By marital status (p<.05): Staff members who are living with a partner are more interested in telecommuting than those who are living alone. In effect, 84 per cent of respondents who are living with a partner and 79 per cent of those who are living alone reported being very interested or interested in this option.

By dependents (p=.00): Staff members with dependents have a stronger interest in telecommuting than those who have no dependents. Indeed, 85 per cent of

respondents with dependents were very interested or interested in this option as compared to 77 per cent of those without dependents.

By professional category (p=.00): Staff members at the Professional level have a stronger interest in telecommuting than those in the General Service and at the Director level and above. While 85 per cent of Professional level respondents reported being very interested or interested in this option, a lesser majority demonstrated their interest among respondents at the Director level and above (79 per cent) and among those in the General Service (78 per cent).

Work applications for alternative work station

Respondents were also prompted to choose what typical applications they would need to work from an alternative work station in order to fulfill their tasks. Out of the 1019 respondents who chose at least one application, 81 per cent reported that they needed access to shared drives. Other respondents needed access to iSeek (35 per cent), IMIS (29 per cent), and Galaxy (21 per cent). Thirty-eight per cent of these respondents needed other applications such as all reference materials, eDoc, ODS, LEO, IMDIS, and specialized applications (Galileo, Nucleus).

Fee associated with telecommuting

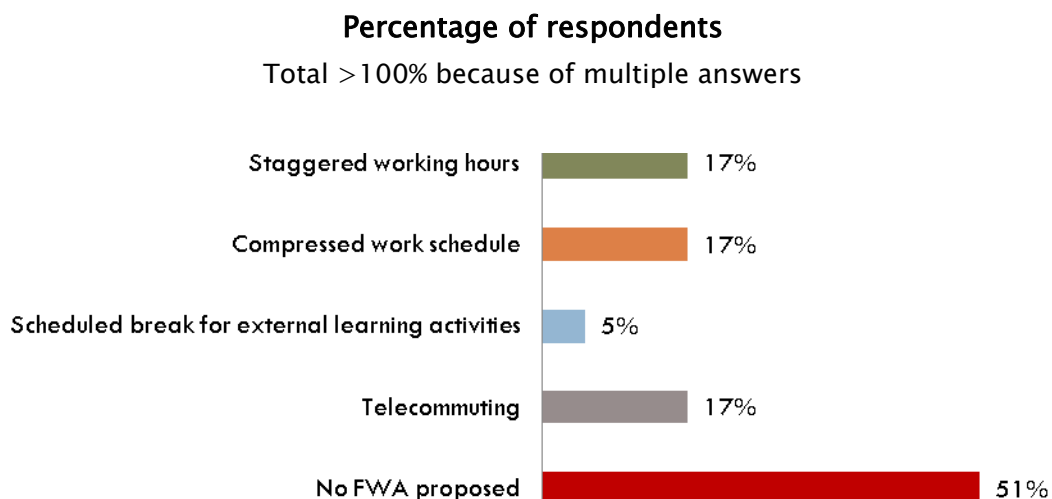
When asked if they would be willing to pay if there was a fee associated with telecommuting, 58 per cent of respondents (885 out of 1523) answered that they were not willing to. However, 77 per cent of those who were willing to pay something in order to be able to work from an alternative work station were ready to pay 200 dollars at most.

Chapter 5: Request of flexible working arrangements

FLEXIBLE WORK PROPOSAL

Most respondents (51 per cent) have not requested any flexible work options during the past 2 years. Only a small percentage of respondents reported that they have proposed informally or formally staggered working hours (17 per cent), compressed work schedule (17 per cent), telecommuting (17 per cent), and scheduled break for external learning activities (5 per cent). The flexible work option that has received the fewest requests is *scheduled break for external learning activities*.

Q.11 – Have you proposed (informally or formally) any of the following FWA options during the past 2 years? Please check all that apply.



OBSTACLES TO REQUEST

Respondents were asked to indicate in order of their preference the primary reasons that prevented them from requesting flexible work options. Respondents were to select three from the following reasons:

- ✓ My job requirements are not conducive to telecommuting
- ✓ Prefer to work in the office
- ✓ Enjoy value of face-to-face interaction
- ✓ Would not be as productive at home
- ✓ Not approved by manager
- ✓ Concerns about perceptions of colleagues
- ✓ Concerns about perceptions of manager
- ✓ Concerns about impact on future career opportunities
- ✓ Did not know FWA was available
- ✓ Other reasons.

The obstacles that prevent staff members from requesting flexible work options are mainly related to *lack of awareness about flexible working arrangements*. Staff members are also afraid that *their use of flexible work options may be frowned upon by their managers or even have negative consequences on their career*. Indeed, most respondents (15 per cent) chose “Did not know flexible working arrangements were available” as the first reason, 11 per cent selected “Concerns about perceptions of manager” as the second reason, and 8 per cent chose “Concerns about impact on future career opportunities” as the third reason.

MOTIVATIONS FOR REQUEST

Respondents were also prompted to indicate in order of their preference the most important reasons that motivated them to request flexible work options. Respondents were to select three from the following reasons:

- ✓ Work efficiency
- ✓ Commuting issues (time and travel expenses, environmental concerns, etc.)
- ✓ Professional development
- ✓ Requested by Organization
- ✓ Childcare responsibilities
- ✓ Elder care responsibilities
- ✓ Other family related reasons
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Other reasons.

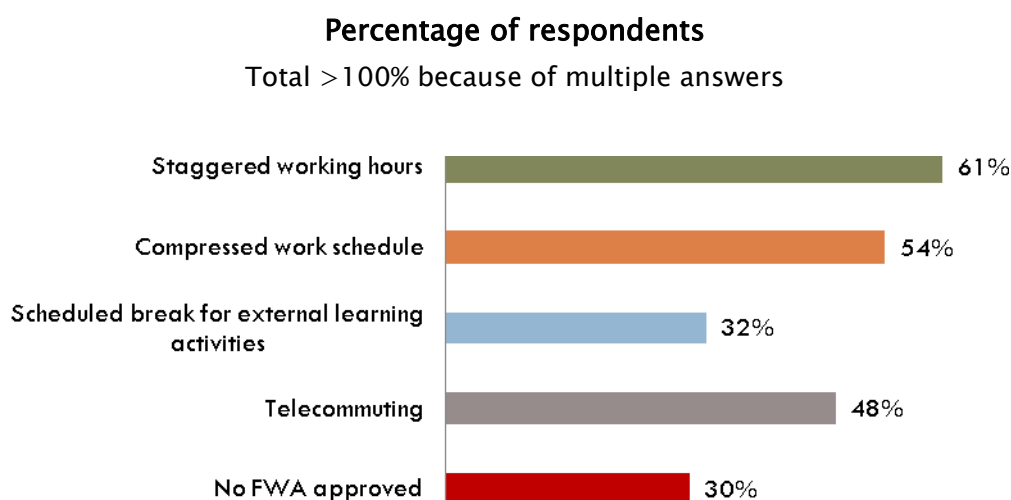
The motivations that prompt staff members to request flexible work options are unanimously related to *work efficiency*. Staff members also request flexible work options due to *commuting issues*. Indeed, “Work efficiency” was selected as a primary reason by 10 per cent of respondents and as a second reason by 9 per cent. Five per cent chose “Commuting issues” as the third reason.

Chapter 6: Use of flexible working arrangements

FLEXIBLE WORK APPROVAL

Overall, the approval rate of flexible working arrangements requests is fairly high except for scheduled break for external learning activities. In effect, 61 per cent of respondents who had proposed staggered working hours, 54 per cent of those who had proposed compressed work schedule, 48 per cent of those who had proposed telecommuting, and 32 per cent of those who had proposed scheduled break for external learning activities received their supervisor's approval. A small percentage of respondents (30 per cent) reported that their request had not been approved.

Q.11.1 - Please indicate the FWA options that you were approved for by your supervisor. Please check all that apply.

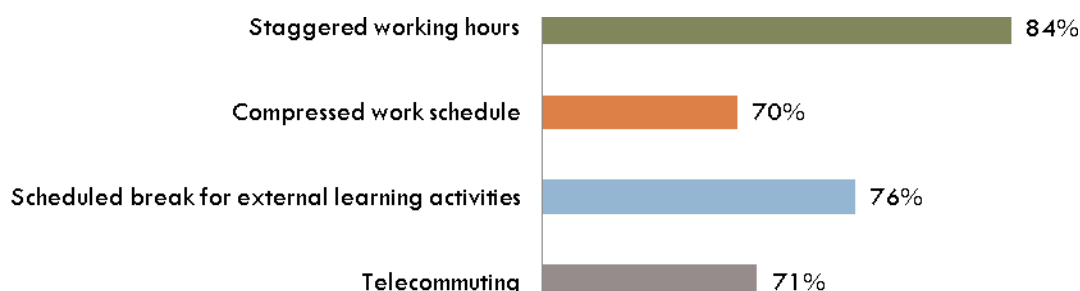


SATISFACTION WITH FLEXIBLE WORK OPTION(S)

Respondents demonstrated great satisfaction with flexible working arrangements. Indeed, a large majority of respondents admitted that they were very satisfied or satisfied with staggered working hours (84 per cent), scheduled break for external learning activities (76 per cent), telecommuting (71 per cent), and compressed work schedule (70 per cent). Although these percentages are all high, we can notice that the flexible work options that satisfy respondents most are *staggered working hours* and *scheduled break for external learning activities*.

Proportion of respondents who are very satisfied/satisfied in using the following options

Total >100% because of multiple answers



OUTCOME OF FLEXIBLE WORK USE

The outcomes of taking flexible work option(s) are predominantly positive. Indeed, a large majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements:

- My productivity, working smarter and better, has increased (69 per cent)
- My job satisfaction has increased (67 per cent)

- My motivation has increased (65 per cent)
- My desire to stay at the United Nations has increased (64 per cent)
- My willingness to recommend the United Nations to others has increased (54 per cent)

These percentages clearly suggest that the use of flexible working arrangements thus improves staff productivity, job satisfaction, and motivation.

PERCEPTION OF SUPPORT

When asked how they perceive people's support for the use of flexible working arrangements in their department/office, *respondents perceived flexible working arrangements as receiving little support from management levels.* Indeed, only a small percentage of respondents perceived senior management (20 per cent), the Executive Office (21 per cent) and middle management (27 per cent) as supportive or very supportive towards the use of FWA in their departments. However, 42 per cent of respondents perceived that their Departmental colleagues were supportive or very supportive of FWA.

Chapter 7: Additional information from supervisors

ACTIONS TAKEN TO PROMOTE FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

When prompted to indicate the actions they have taken to promote flexible working arrangements during the past 2 years, 45 per cent of supervisors reported that they have promoted and encouraged flexible work informally, 32 per cent of supervisors have provided information to staff about flexible work options and procedures, 24 per cent have used flexible working arrangements themselves, and 20 per cent have raised the issue at staff meetings and town halls.

Thirty per cent of supervisors also admitted that they have not taken any action. Reasons for not doing so mainly include lack of information about flexible working arrangements and lack of managerial support in the implementation of the policies.

I myself need to receive information about the options and therefore I have not promoted these measures. Admin in the mission should try to provide us with further information.

-- Male Professional supervisor

Nothing was allowed by my former Supervisor, so it didn't make sense to promote it. Senior management must also show support.

-- Female Professional supervisor

Chapter 8: Recommendations

1. Raise awareness about the availability of FWA.

Most staff members do not know that such opportunity is available to them. Even supervisors are not all aware of the existence of FWA policies. Suggestions thus include making the information about FWA on iSeek more apparent and circulating the Secretary-General's bulletin on Flexible Working Arrangements ([ST/SGB/2003/4](#)) by email and in offices.

FWA is not very known here. Very few staff use it and managers will not agree easily to give FWA.

Please promote the FWA both regulations and application so that people don't think that it's a privilege but better office management.

2. Clarify the application procedures and facilitate the approval process.

Although the Secretary-General's Bulletin provides the policies, the actual application procedures are not clear to many and are often subject to interpretation. Staff members also feel that the different layers of approval make the application process quite cumbersome and actually decrease their chance of being approved for flexible work.

The rules should be made clearer and applied impartially. The decision to allow FWA should be based only on factual elements, and not on personal judgments.

Policy and procedures must be made clear and less subject to subjective interpretation, thus achieving consistency and reduce the perception of

requesting a "favor". The application must go to HR, or at a minimum a refused application must be reviewed by HR.

It could be made even easier to apply, only the approval of the line manager should be enough.

3. Ensure consistent implementation across departments.

In order for the implementation of these arrangements to be consistent across departments, there should be standard procedures for all to follow. Besides, staff members need to have detailed information about who can make a request, what type of request best suits their situation, how to make a request, and what rights and responsibilities staff members have. Supervisors also need to know what to do when they receive a request, how to consider a request, what to do if the request is approved, what to do if the request is denied, and what rights and responsibilities supervisors have.

In cases where flexible working arrangements are not relevant to specific job types and working environments, management should thus provide official notification explaining why flexible working arrangements are not authorized in the Department/Office/Division. At least, this would help staff understand that managers are accountable and sensitive to their needs. Often indeed, staff members feel as if the decision-making belongs to management and they have no bargaining power.

Have seen evidence that other offices apply the rules differently and not across the board. Some are more entitled to participate. One rule says it's for a limited period but I know of others who use this all year round.

There should be a policy guidelines to help supervisors approve/reject requests. My previous supervisor was very supportive of compressed

*work schedule but not the current one (same organization same post).
Why the difference!?*

4. Make the use of FWA a strategic priority.

Survey results show that staff members using FWA are more productive, more satisfied with their job, and more motivated. Making the use of these FWA a strategic priority means taking the time to better understand the challenges and aspirations of staff in order to develop a needs-focused FWA system and ultimately improve staff effectiveness as a whole.

Staff should not have to fight for the right to FWA, nor they should be made to feel as if they are being lazy if they ask for it.

It is old-fashioned and even the profit-run corporate sector has shifted its thinking. Trusting staff members to produce the same (or more) if they are given the flexibility to do so on their own time will have positive results. Empowering staff members makes them feel trusted and proud. 'Lazy' types who do not produce under flexible arrangements are just as likely to be lazy when present at work. This should be addressed through normal ePAS mechanisms and hard workers who do appreciate flexibility should not be penalised.

I used to do that in my previous employment (outside the UN), and as a professional I ensured that I perform my job over and above expectation. At no time productivity or effectiveness was ever an issue. Staff who are professional will get the job done whether its in the office, at home or during the weekends. Those who under-perform would not deliver no matter where they work. The key lies in the quality of staff and of management.

5. Demonstrate support and commitment to the use of FWA.

Demonstrated support and commitment from top management and senior leadership is crucial for supervisors to be able to fully implement the use of FWA in their departments. Management's open support of flexible working arrangements can also have a positive impact on staff commitment to the organization.

If one's supervisor or higher level management is not supportive, there is nothing we can do. When I have discussed possible options for job exchanges between duty stations, learning/work opportunities etc. with HR, the question of who would pay came up and the idea couldn't be pursued further. Supervisors are often afraid that if they agree to one request, all staff will want to attend a learning activity or will not be available at every moment.

Enhance awareness of the management. Encourage the management to show stronger support to this policy.

6. Enhance technical tools.

Having access to work applications from an alternate work station can facilitate telecommuting in particular. This would make working from home easier and can help a lot of staff even though they are not necessarily using a flexible work option.

Improve webmail. Make it more robust, stop it from timing out, strengthen it in practical ways such as giving access to an address book.

Assist with making shared drives accessible, or provide memory sticks, or in some way help get access to PC information from home.

Appendix 1: List of represented departments

DEPARTMENTS AND OFFICES	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
DESA – Department of Economic and Social Affairs	205
OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	151
DGACM – Department for General Assembly and Conference Management	144
DFS – Department of Field Support	127
ESCAP – Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	125
DM – Department of Management	113
DPI – Department of Public Information	99
ICTY – International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia	94
Other Departments	91
UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	87
UNOG – United Nations Office at Geneva	74
OIOS – Office of Internal Oversight Services	68
DPKO – Department of Peacekeeping Operations	60
DPA – Department of Political Affairs	58
DM/OHRM – Office of Human Resources Management	39
DM/OPPBA – Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts	39
DSS – Department of Safety and Security	39
OLA – Office of Legal Affairs	38
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme	36
DM/OCSS – Office of Central Support Services	32
UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	31
OICT – Office of Information and Communications Technology	27
ECLAC – Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	23
UNON – United Nations Office at Nairobi	22
ECA – Economic Commission for Africa	19
DDA – Department for Disarmament Affairs	17
ECE – Economic Commission for Europe	15
EOSG – Executive Office of the Secretary-General	15

UN-HABITAT – United Nations Human Settlements Programme	15
OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	14
ESCWA – Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	9
CEB – Chief Executive Board for Coordination Secretariat	4
OHRLLS – High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States	4
ICTR – International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda	1
Total	1959

Appendix 2: List of represented missions

MISSIONS AND OTHER OFFICES	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
UNLB – United Nations Logistic Base	49
MINUSTAH – United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti	42
MONUC – United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo	4
ONUCI – United Nations Operation in Ivory Coast	3
UNMIL – United Nations Mission in Liberia	3
UNMIT – United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor–Leste	3
BINUB – United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi	2
MINURCAT – United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic	2
UNAMA – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan	2
UNITAR – United Nations Institute for Training and Research	2
UNMIK – United Nations Mission in Kosovo	2
UNOMIG – United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia	2
BONUCA – United Nations Peace–Building Support Office in the Central African Republic	1
MINURSO – United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara	1
UNAMI – United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq	1
UNAMID – United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur	1
UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon	1
UNMIS – UN Mission in Sudan	1
UNPOS – United Nations Political Office for Somalia	1
Total	123