

**Frequently Asked Questions - All Duty Stations
on alternate work arrangements and telecommuting in connection with the
Novel Coronavirus
(COVID-19) outbreak
Release as of 23 March 2020**

**I. FOR DUTY STATIONS WITH ALTERNATE WORK ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE
(Offices are open virtually)**

1. Staff 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 and the respective Head of Entity in several 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, staff members 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 staff members are requested to discharge their functions from a remote location, generally their home, as an alternate work arrangement. This measure is commensurate to the extraordinary situation we face and is meant to facilitate business continuity of the Organization at a time where it is essential to reduce social contact to a minimum.

As such, it should not be confused with flexible working arrangements as regulated by ST/SGB/2019/3 and ST/IC/2019/15 and staff members are not required to fill any agreement or form. However, at the end of every week, you should ensure that telecommuting days are entered in Umoja.

Finally, in light of the growing numbers of universities, schools and day care closures and other disruptions to family support services, the requirement regarding core working hours' periods is temporarily lifted, 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.

Staff members who need to care for their children and cannot work full time may avail of annual leave, uncertified sick leave and SLWOP or use them in combination with remote working in order to reduce their working schedule.

2. How to record the telecommuting days in Umoja?

In Umoja Self Service, via Create Leave Request, select the leave type “Telecommuting-COVID-19” from the drop-down menu to record telecommuting as a result of COVID-19. 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”.

3. I am an intern/consultant/temporary appointee. Do the alternate working arrangements apply to me?

The requirement to work remotely and the conditions described above apply to all UN personnel, staff and non-staff. Adjustments to your assignments may be needed depending on the circumstances.

4. 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 may temporarily assign you other functions and activities that can be undertaken remotely, such as online training and professional development.

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 attached 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 be placed on special leave with full pay (SLWFP), in which case you would not be required to exhaust your annual leave before being placed on SLWFP.

5. Can I work remotely from outside the country of my duty station?

Since your physical presence on UN premises is not required and provided that the nature of your functions allow for it, you can in principle carry out your functions from anywhere within the country of your duty station (including beyond commuting distance) or outside the country of your duty station.

You should however discuss this option with your manager, particularly in case of time difference between your duty station and your alternate place of work (within or outside the country of your duty station).

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 a security clearance
3. Download the e-TA and enable geolocation and notifications on your phones.

You should also note that the 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.

6. 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. Can I work remotely from the country I was visiting?

If feasible and compatible with your functions, you may:

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

If neither option is possible, you may request annual leave including advance annual leave. In exceptional circumstances, you may also request special leave with full pay, for example, if you have exhausted your annual leave balance and have initiated travel before travel restrictions were put in place. No DSA will be payable.

II. FOR DUTY STATIONS WHERE ALTERNATE WORK ARRANGEMENTS ARE NOT IN PLACE

7. Question: I am reluctant to commute to work given the increase in the number of cases of COVID-19. Can I telecommute?

In duty stations where alternate work arrangement have not been implemented (i.e. offices are open physically), telecommuting is possible up to three days a week as per ST/SGB/2019/3. Provided your functions can be performed remotely, telecommuting is strongly encouraged as this will significantly reduce the staffing footprint in UN premises, and therefore reduce risk to personnel. If you have to go to the office, your risk will still be reduced by the overall reduction in

staff transiting through the building each day. In addition to three days of telecommuting, staggered working hours are to be availed upon as much as possible to avoid rush hour.

For purposes of time and attendance, staff members are reminded that they must record the days on which they telecommute in Umoja. In Umoja Self Service, via Create Leave Request, select the leave type “Telecommuting-COVID-19” from the drop-down menu to record telecommuting as a result of COVID-19. 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”.

8. 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. Can I telecommute from the country I was visiting?

If feasible and compatible with your functions, you may:

- a. be authorized to telecommute from your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable;
- b. be authorized to report to duty at a UN System Office in your place of home leave/family visit/reverse education grant visit. No DSA will be payable.

If neither option is possible, you may request annual leave, including advance annual leave. In exceptional circumstances, you may also request special leave with full pay, for example, if you have exhausted all your annual leave balance and have initiated travel before travel restrictions were put in place. No DSA will be payable.

In such instances, staff are 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.

9. 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, a staff member cannot be forced to telecommute. Telecommuting is a voluntary agreement between staff and their managers.

Staff 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, staff are authorized and strongly 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.

In duty stations where the physical closure of the UN premises has been requested by the local authorities or decided by the Secretary-General the authorized official, offices may remain open virtually in order to ensure business continuity. In such event, staff members may be requested to work from an alternative work site, including their home (see section I above on alternate working arrangements for more details).

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

As a precautionary measure, you should self-quarantine. If there is no requirement from the local authorities and/or the United Nations to work remotely on a full-time basis in your duty station, in these situations, staff should undertake full time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve, in order to reduce the footprint in the office, your exposure to transit and other crowded areas.

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

In duty station where there is no requirement from the local authorities and/or the United Nations to work remotely on a full-time basis, UN personnel who are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or a severe underlying medical condition staff are authorized and strongly encouraged to undertake full time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve. You will need to self-monitor and inform your supervisor and Executive Office or local human resources office. Your supervisor 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. Your Executive Office or local human resources office should also be provided with the name and contact number of your primary care provider which will be used by DHMOSH should any verification subsequently be required. If you are unsure if your medical condition is considered in this category, please contact your primary health care provider for advice. If working from home as an alternative work arrangement is not feasible, staff members should discuss other options with their Executive Office or local human resources office.

12. I am on temporary appointment. Can I telecommute?

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

- 13. I have just returned to my duty station from a trip to a country affected by travel restrictions due to COVID-19. Given the health recommendation by the national and local health officials, I would like to work from home. My supervisor says I cannot work from home because of my specific responsibilities. What should I do?**

You must stay at home for 14 days following the date of your return to your duty station. Please discuss alternate work assignments with your supervisor, Executive Office or your local human resources service, including online training or other professional development.

- 14. I have read the information that those with severe chronic medical conditions or who are over 65 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, staff are authorized and strongly encouraged to undertake full time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation resolves. 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.

- 15. 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.

- 16. 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 are authorized and strongly encouraged to undertake full time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation(s) resolve. 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.

- 17. 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 have not been implemented, 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.

18. I am an intern and would like to work from home during this time period. Can I do so?

Yes, these measures apply for all UN personnel including consultants and interns as long as feasible. Please discuss with your supervisor and respective Executive Office or local human resources office.

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

As per 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.

20. My child's school has closed, and I now have to stay home. Can I telecommute?

Yes, in the case of emergency situations beyond their control, such as school closures, staff are authorized and strongly encouraged to undertake full time telecommuting for five days a week until the situation resolves. It should be understood that arrangements for telecommuting are between a staff member and his/her manager 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.

Staff members are reminded that while telecommuting, they are working full-time but at home. In the event staff members need to take care of their children during part of the day, managers should exercise full flexibility with regards to working hours, provided that staff members work for the required number of hours. If full-time work is not possible, staff members may telecommute for half a day and take leave for the other half of the day. Alternatively, if full-time care of a child is required, the staff member can avail of annual leave or if annual leave is not available, staff members should discuss with their Executive Office or local HR office other alternatives.

III. OTHER

21. 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, a staff member who is sick should be placed on sick leave in accordance with established policy. In cases where the staff member feels 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, a staff member who is free of symptoms is able to telecommute full time if their functions allow them to do so.

22. I have small children who attend school. Now that schools and most kindergartens in my duty station are closed, and since 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 growing numbers of universities, schools and day care closures and other disruptions to family support services, the requirement regarding core working hours' periods is temporarily lifted in order to afford staff members the maximum flexibility they need in this challenging situation. They are expected to work for the required number of hours and continue to deliver on the assigned tasks to the maximum possible. Managers are requested to provide full flexibility. Such flexibility must not be construed as underperformance. Staff members who need to care for their children and may not be able to fulfill a full-time work, should avail of leave if needed, including mixing half-time work schedule with half-day leave or any other appropriate mix that will allow them to meet both their personal and professional needs.