



Our next normal: Flexible workplace policy

Version 1.0

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

February 2023

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1. Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges that were faced with **courage and creativity**. We are taking the opportunity to build on the good practices and lessons learned from the past years to transform our working methods and behaviours. Our goals for the “next normal” are to strengthen our mandate delivery; better support Member States, our clients and beneficiaries; and to use our resources efficiently and effectively. In order to do this, our working arrangements and working environment must enable our personnel to **innovate and thrive**.

The pandemic also demonstrated that some new ways of working can have downsides, such as social or professional isolation, that need to be actively managed. Mainstreaming new ways of doing business into the “next normal” must therefore include active engagement to maximize the upside while mitigating the downside.

The initial version of this policy, which will be updated as required, conforms to standards and guidance in the UN Secretariat, incorporating elements of working arrangements and workplace design, and which remain under comprehensive review by the system-wide High-level Committee on Management.

2. Guiding principles

Our goals are to strengthen our mandate delivery, to better support Member States and our clients and beneficiaries, including those in the field, and to use our resources efficiently and effectively. In order to do this, our working environment must enable our personnel to innovate and thrive.

Cultivate an agile and resilient workforce

Provide personnel up-to-date tools, systems, learning resources and policies to conduct their work in a way that maximizes flexibility and collaboration, thereby cultivating personal and organizational resilience as well as enhancing business continuity.

Foster innovation and continuous improvement

Promote and reward staff initiatives to innovate, collaborate, learn and continually improve working methods.

Encourage a diverse and inclusive culture

Recognize, recruit, retain and nurture a workforce that reflects the diversity of the world at large as well as an organizational culture that promotes social equity and in which all personnel feel safe and free to be themselves.

Embed environmental sustainability into all operations and relevant policies

Mainstream environmental sustainability rather than treating it as a “nice to have” or an add-on. Use every opportunity to reduce the Organization’s environmental footprint, including by reducing travel, and seek ways to positively impact the environment.

Ensure health and safety of personnel and delegates

The health and safety of personnel and delegates is of paramount importance, including well-being and mental health. Policies and practices that encourage and enable work-life balance should be promoted. To preserve public health, mitigating measures may be implemented and in line with those of the host country and local authorities.

Communicate transparently, consistently and regularly

Management at all levels will maintain frequent and two-way communication with personnel and staff representatives, keeping them abreast of, and soliciting their views on, issues that are likely to impact them.

3. Working arrangements

Recalling [staff rule 1.4](#) on hours of work as well as [ST/SGB/2019/3](#) and [ST/IC/2019/15](#) on Flexible working arrangements:

- 3.1. Effective immediately, the *default* working arrangement is daily physical presence at the workplace in all duty stations. Beyond this default arrangement, flexible working arrangements are mainstreamed but remain a privilege and voluntary, subject to management discretion.
- 3.2. Flexible working arrangements are expected to be in line with personnel's roles, responsibilities and exigencies of service.
- 3.3. Given the variety of operational environments across global UN-Habitat, flexible working arrangements are to be tailored to the unique circumstances of each duty station and to be harmonized with UN country teams at each location, to the extent possible.
- 3.4. All flexible working arrangements shall follow the procedure as specified in [ST/IC/2019/15](#), with the personnel requesting approval from the supervisor.
- 3.5. **All agreements are to be recorded at bit.ly/UNHabitatFWA.**
- 3.6. Approved flexible working arrangements may be withdrawn at any time and remain subject to exigencies of service and satisfactory performance.
- 3.7. As set out in [ST/SGB/2019/3](#), the options of flexible working arrangements are as follows, with additional conditions specific to UN-Habitat:
- 3.8. **Staggered working hours** may be granted with the approval of the supervisor, renewable every six months.
- 3.9. **Compressed work schedules** may be granted with the approval of the supervisor, renewable every six months.
- 3.10. **Scheduled breaks for external learning activities** may be granted with the approval of the supervisor, renewable every six months.
- 3.11. **Telecommuting within the official duty station** may be granted up to a maximum of three days per week with the approval of the supervisor. During a standard five-day work week, personnel shall be in the office at least two days per week.
 - 3.11.1. Within each team, half of the team is to be present in the office every day, to the extent possible. The working arrangements of each team are the responsibility of the supervisor.
- 3.12. **Telecommuting outside the official duty station** may be granted for up to six months in compelling circumstances, which are normally on humanitarian grounds that are outside the direct control of personnel, including in support of the health of personnel and their dependents, or other family-related circumstances with special requirements such as those linked to adoption or other legal processes with limited duration.
 - 3.12.1. The duration may be exceptionally extended by an additional three months, for a total of nine months.
 - 3.12.2. Such arrangements are subject to the provisions of paras. 3.10-3.12 of [ST/SGB/2019/3](#).

- 3.12.3. Such arrangements, with the prior consent of the relevant head of division, shall be approved only by the Executive Director or as delegated to the Director, Management Advisory and Compliance Service and must be subsequently recorded by human resources partners in Umoja.
- 3.12.4. Subsequent requests for telecommuting outside the duty station may be considered subject to the provisions in the preceding paragraphs, without prescribed regulation on the period between such arrangements.
- 3.12.5. Ad hoc requests to telecommute outside the duty station for up to five consecutive working days may be agreed in writing between the personnel and the supervisor without processing of the form. Such arrangements are to be considered on a case by case basis and are to be one-off instances without regular recurrence.

4. Office arrangements

4.1. Nairobi headquarters

- 4.1.1. Office space guidelines are pursuant to annex A of the Memorandum of understanding concerning occupancy and use of premises at the United Nations complex in Nairobi by offices of the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes.
- 4.1.2. Such annex conforms to flexible workspace strategies in place at other headquarters duty stations.
- 4.1.3. The joint project team of UNON and UN-Habitat on office redesign are currently in the planning and design phases, with expected implementation in the second half of 2023.
- 4.1.4. Personnel with telecommuting arrangements may be requested to relinquish a dedicated workspace if sufficient workspaces are not available for all personnel to have a dedicated workspace.
- 4.1.5. Pending the reorganization of office space following the implementation phase of the office redesign project, managers are requested to resolve the organization of office space amongst themselves, including the sharing of workspaces if required. If such resolution cannot be achieved, the matter is to be escalated to the Director, Management Advisory and Compliance Service.
- 4.1.6. Additional guidance and directives will be communicated by the office redesign project team.

4.2. Outside headquarters

- 4.2.1. Office space guidelines are subject to agreements between UN-Habitat and the landlord or service provider.
- 4.2.2. The head of office in each duty station is responsible for office arrangements in the duty station.
- 4.2.3. Such arrangements are expected to conform to the prevailing office arrangements of the premises or of the UN country team, where applicable.
- 4.2.4. Personnel with telecommuting arrangements may be requested to relinquish a dedicated workspace.

Document Information

Title	UN-Habitat flexible workplace policy
Version	1.0
Source language	English
Responsible Officer	Stephen Slawsky
Developed by	Stephen Slawsky
Subjects	Next normal, new ways of working, flexible working arrangements, office space guidelines
Date approved	9 February 2023
Original version 1.0 approved by	Executive Director
Revised version approved by	n/a
Applicable to	UN-Habitat personnel, including staff, consultants, contractors, interns, and UN Volunteers
Purpose	To provide guidance on the next normal of flexible working arrangements and office arrangements
Conforms to	UN Secretariat standards and guidelines
Related Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The next normal: reimagining how we work at UNHQ • ST/SGB/2019/3 on flexible working arrangements • ST/IC/2019/15 on flexible working arrangements • Memorandum of understanding concerning occupancy and use of premises at the United Nations complex in Nairobi by offices of the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes
Distribution	Habnet, email broadcast

Document History:

Version	Release date	Summary of changes
Version 1.0	9 February 2023	Original version