



CEB
Chief Executives Board
for Coordination

High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM)

Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce

Discussion Paper on the Interim Report of the Task Force on
the Future of the UN System Workforce

(HLCM Session, 29 September 2020)

Objective

This discussion paper is based on feedback received from HLCM members on the Interim Report of the CEB Task Force on the Future of the UN System Workforce through an online consultation process. The present paper lays the focus on areas of the interim paper that have attracted the most interest. It does not constitute a comprehensive collection of all feedback. Specific recommendations on language, and organizational experiences that have been received have been shared with the members of the Task Force to ensure they are given due consideration.

The objective of the discussion paper is to facilitate a targeted discussion of the Committee to guide the work of the Task Force for the coming months. HLCM is also asked for possible endorsements of elements of the interim report. While the paper suggests discussion points, it should not preclude an open discussion of HLCM including on aspects and proposals not captured by the online consultation.

Following the discussion and guidance of HLCM, the decision points that the Committee has decided on will be acted on by the TF and its sub-groups. A further report will be issued in a more comprehensive manner for discussion and decision by HLCM.

Overall Assessment of the Interim Paper through initial feedback

Many organizations expressed general appreciation for the interim report and the work of the Task Force. The responsiveness and adjustment to the new realities that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the work of the UN system have been stressed as positive elements of the interim report. Many responses positively highlighted the focus on “putting people first” in the proposed initiatives and lauded the increased focus on the field. The need and usefulness of UN system cooperation and harmonization in the three areas of work - remote working, an agile contract modality and enabling technology – was broadly recognized. Detailed elaboration of initiatives and recommendations was suggested as next steps for the Task Force. The necessity of a careful consideration of cost for all initiatives was highlighted. The inclusion of experiences, best practices and benchmarks from private- and public sectors was advised, as well as a more prominent place for environmental considerations.

While the work of the Task Force was in general considered forward looking, there were divergent views on the scope covered by the interim report. While some responses favored a prioritization of initiatives to focus the energy of the Task Force, others advocated for a bolder and broader approach including more innovative ideas.

In particular the inclusion of the following elements into the work of the Task Force was recommended:

Feedback from multiple organizations advocated for the Task Force to develop a **“family care leave policy”** to address the needs of today’s diverse family configurations. Such a policy should be overarching and designed to include all family situations, not only limited to parental status, but include other caregiving circumstances, such as self-care, or caring for elderly, siblings or other loved ones.

The normalization and exploration of gains of **part-time employment** was mentioned by several organizations in their feedback. Connected to the work-life balance, flexible working through part-time or job-sharing roles was deemed a key mechanism the UN could embrace and promote for all employees.

It was also proposed that HLCM proceeded to endorsing the **Leadership commitments**¹ laid out in paragraph 20 of the Interim Report (see Annex I for the proposed language) as an important enabler of cultural change. While the leadership commitments and engagement of senior staff were recognized as a crucial piece of the puzzle, a more prominent incorporation of the role of staff, including bottom-up engagement and empowerment, in the overall work of the Task Force was proposed.

Suggested Discussion Points:

- *Are there specific elements, e.g., as a family care leave policy or part-time work or other forward leaning concepts, that would merit to be included in the Task Force's forthcoming work?*
- *Is HLCM prepared to endorse the Leadership Commitments (as rephrased in Annex I) for the Task Force to work on guidance on how to further formalize and operationalize the principles?*
- *Can HLCM support the interim paper and the overall direction of work of the Task Force for the next months?*

Remote Working

Several entities, based on internal surveys, reported a mostly effective and positive experience with remote working in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The notion that remote working will undoubtedly constitute an important feature of the “next normal”, and that a solid framework for remote working would be needed was underscored in feedback received. The merit of coordination and some harmonization among UN system entities, taking into account differences in mandated activities, was generally recognized.

Many organizations voiced support for the codification of the proposed remote working principles (paragraphs 28-35 in the interim report).

One comment noted that the broader approach of “flexible working arrangement” instead of remote working might be considered more useful. Further integration of the remote working workstream with the contractual modalities and technology streams was deemed desirable. The need for a remote working framework or policy to encompass elements such as the responsibility and trust of staff and management, results-based performance evaluation, measurement of results and staff wellbeing was reinforced by some organizations. Other points of focus that the Task Force should consider in detail comprised how the examination of which functions can or cannot be performed remotely, entitlements and training for managers and staff.

While many organizations stressed a positive experience with short-term benefits in terms of productivity and staff satisfaction, some cautioned that broader and continuous analysis of the impact of remote working was necessary for success in the mid- and long term.

A comparison of the impact of full-time remote work in contrast to part-time telecommuting was stated as an interesting was proposed as an interesting benchmark for the Task Force to consider. The usefulness of a 50 mile radius as definition for “outside the duty station” was questioned by several commenters.

¹ Putting people first; driving a passion for results; Embracing new leadership models; building trust; pursuing the simplification of rules and policies; using technology to strengthen delivery; embracing learning; showcasing and advancing diversity, inclusion and gender parity; creating an Employee Value Proposition; embracing the greater cause mindset: “A truly One UN”

Suggested Discussion Points:

- *Are any crucial elements missing from the focus area “Remote Working” of the interim report?*
- *Does HLCM support translating inter-agency principles into the elements of a system-wide framework that guides organizations’ remote working policies?*

Agile Contract Modality

The proposal of an optional agile contract modality was overwhelmingly welcomed by respondents, with doubts remaining among some participants. Making the UN a better employer of choice and a more diverse and inclusive workforce were expected benefits of an agile contract modality.

The cruciality of firmly aligning new contract modalities with the proposal for remote working, and the necessity of gathering input from and consulting with relevant stakeholders were emphasized in several comments. More information was sought on the relationship between existing modalities and the new modality.

It was stressed that any new modality should be designed to allow for sufficient flexibility for individual UN system entities to adapt the modality for their specific needs.

Balancing the needs of staff members and the organization was mentioned by several organizations as an important aspect for the Task Force to examine. Working conditions and well-being in general, family care, part-time work, career development, mobility and compensation were most cited as critical areas to be taken into account.

A new contract modality was also seen as a possible option to harmonize non-staff modalities and the possibility of introducing several options, including for general service staff living beyond commuting distance was introduced.

Suggested Discussion Points:

- *Does HLCM support the development of a new contract modality?*
- *Which of the elements² of laid out in the interim report, or which new elements do need particular emphasis during the development of the modality?*

Enabling Technology

General support was voiced by respondents for the assessment of the role of digital technology and for the proposed initiatives under this work stream. Recognition of benefits of collaboration, aligning and standardizing processes through pilot projects was widespread. The inclusion of ICT experts and the HLCM’s Digital and Technology Network in pilot initiatives was recommended in some comments.

The “Digital UN ID” project gained particular interest with some respondents and it was proposed that HLCM recognize it as a priority.

² Complementarity to existing contract modalities, agility, transparency around contract durations and predictability, career agility, simplicity of administration, financial sustainability, social protection, diversity and inclusion, flexibility and virtual working arrangements, fairness transparency and insurance of accountability (the full elements can be found in paragraph 37 of the interim report).

It was underscored in several comments that in all its endeavors the Task Force should carefully consider security and privacy implications. A cautious approach towards using AI was recommended by some respondents, in particular for recruitment. The inclusion of AI experts was advised in this respect.

Suggested Discussion Points:

- *Are there missing elements in the assessment of the role of technology or the pilot projects?*
- *Does HLCM endorse the identified pilot project?*
- *Does HLCM support the Digital UN ID as a priority project?*

Annex I: Leadership Commitments

Leadership Commitments, building on the UN System Leadership Framework, the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 crisis and the challenges identified among entities.

- a. **Putting people first** by investing in and enabling our workforce
- b. **Driving a passion for results** and foster a “can do mentality” while holding people accountable
- c. **Embracing new leadership models** that foster greater collaboration with less hierarchy recognizing that the future of work requires different skills and different delivery and operating models
- d. **Building trust** through ~~authenticity, dialogue, courage and transparency~~ **authentic and courageous dialogue, transparency and accountability.**
- e. ~~Aggressively~~ **Systematically pursuing** the simplification of rules and policies to enable faster decision-making
- f. **Using technology** to strengthen delivery of results globally and enable new ways of working regardless of location
- g. **Embracing learning and Career enhancement to foster and fostering** growth mindsets and new skills for a volatile and increasingly complex world
- h. **Showcasing and advancing diversity, inclusion and gender parity**
- i. Creating a clear **Employee Value Proposition** to position the UN System as an employer of choice
- j. **Embracing the greater cause mindset: “A truly One UN”**- this aims to foster a mindset that goes beyond each organisation and genuinely places the common objectives first **and people at the center.**