

16.13 Flexible Working Arrangements

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A. Guiding Principles.

1. The policy on flexible working arrangements is part of a broader well-being initiative to support employees in managing the demands of working life. With the full support of senior management, this initiative aims to strengthen an organizational culture that enables employees to create an optimal fit in their work and personal life. Supervisors are expected to implement this policy in an equitable and consistent manner across the board for all employees of the organizational unit.
2. Flexible working arrangements are voluntary and initiated by eligible employees and must be distinguished from alternate working arrangements, which are decided upon by the Organization.
3. The granting of a flexible working arrangement, or the continuation thereof, does not constitute an entitlement but falls entirely within the discretionary authority of the supervisor in view of the exigencies of service. By the same token, the decision on how best to implement flexible working arrangements remains at the discretion of the supervisor who is responsible for the results of the organizational unit, bearing in mind that flexible working arrangements may be more suitable to some jobs or functions than to others.
4. Supervisors are encouraged to consider favourably flexible working arrangements, and to only deny requests that are incompatible with the functions or due to exigencies of service. Employees do not need to provide reasons for their requests.
5. The authorization of flexible working arrangements is for a specific duration. This should be reviewed and discussed between the supervisor and the employee, as needed.
6. The use of flexible work arrangements should not result in an additional workload for other team members or employees.

B. Definitions

7. **Flexible working arrangements (FWA)** are voluntary adjustments to the normal working hours and/or location. Normal working hours may vary according to the duty station. Flexible working arrangements are different from leave, compensatory time off and part-time work, and include:
 - Flexible working hours;
 - Break for external learning activities;
 - Telecommuting.
8. **Flexible working hours** consist of adjusting the start and end times of the working days while respecting the core working hours, the normal working hours per day, and the normal working week.
9. **Break for external learning activities** consists in requesting a break during the normal working hours dedicated to learning activities.
10. **Telecommuting** refers to a situation in which work is performed outside of the office premises for a scheduled period. Telecommuting, as defined in this policy, does not cover occasional situations where employees carry out their functions away from the office on an ad-hoc basis. Such requests are approved by the supervisor.
11. **Commuting distance** means the distance between the employee's telecommuting location and the office premises that allows the employee to reach the office within two (2) hours.
12. **Alternate working arrangements (AWA)**, which may also involve working from an alternate work location, are implemented at the request of the Organization due to "force majeure" or exceptional crisis situations.

C. Eligibility

Eligible personnel

13. Unless otherwise specified hereafter and in the HR Manual, flexible working arrangements may be authorized for all persons employed by UNESCO, namely staff members and non-staff members (referred to as "employees").¹

D. Flexible working hours arrangements

14. Employees may adjust the start and end times of their working days, provided they work the required number of working hours set out for their duty station and are reachable during the normal working week and core working hours established for their duty station.

15. At Headquarters, the normal working week is Monday through Friday, for 37.5 hours, and the normal working day is 7.5 hours, not including time for lunch. At Headquarters, the core periods during which employees shall be reachable are between 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. and from 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Employees must complete the balance of working hours for each day before, between, after or partly before, between and/or after the core working hours. The daily lunch break is not considered working time and shall be for a minimum of 30 consecutive minutes.

16. At duty stations away from Headquarters, the normal working week, working day and core working hours are established by the Director/Head of Field/Liaison Office/ Institute in accordance with the local conditions and practices of other locally based organizations of the United Nations.

17. Some jobs, functions or roles may not be compatible with the flexible working hours' arrangement, for instance in services subject to shift work. Supervisors will determine the compatibility of the job, functions or role with the flexible working hours' arrangement, and will apply it in an equitable and consistent manner across the board for all employees with such similar jobs, functions or roles.

18. Flexible working arrangements may be limited or suspended during statutory meetings (e.g. sessions of the Governing Bodies, Steering Committees, etc.) or in other exceptional circumstances as established by the Director-General.

For the provisions on the working week, working hours per day, working hours and special working hours, see [HR Manual Item 2.4 \(Hours of Work\)](#).

E. Break for external learning activities

19. Staff members wishing to attend external courses relevant to their professional development at universities or other institutions of learning may request breaks of up to six (6) hours per week. The hours spent away from work during a particular week must be made up during that week.

For the provisions on the external study scheme, see [HR Manual Item 15.4 \(The External Study Scheme\)](#).

F. Telecommuting (Working away from office premises)

Modalities and hours of work

20. Telecommuting may be approved up to a maximum of two (2) days per week. Telecommuting may be taken in units of half or full days.

21. The total number of hours that telecommuting employees are expected to work shall not change, regardless of the telecommuting location.

Compatibility with the type of job/assignment

22. The telecommuting arrangement should normally concern activities which do not require any direct daily in-person interaction with colleagues and/or physical presence for completion.

Work environment and equipment for telecommuting

23. Employees who have been authorized to telecommute will ensure that a proper work environment for telecommuting is maintained to discharge their functions. This includes an appropriate workspace and the necessary IT equipment and connectivity. For IT security purposes, the employees telecommuting shall only work from a UNESCO laptop. Employees are also responsible for following the IT security and other policies of the Bureau of Digital Business Solutions (e.g. records management), as established in the Administrative Manual.

24. Employees are responsible for any costs incurred to set up and maintain a proper work environment. UNESCO will not be responsible for operating costs, maintenance of the telecommuting place or any incidental cost associated with the use of the employee's residence. Utility costs (including telephone line installation, telephone calls and use of the internet) and travel costs from/to the telecommuting location shall not be reimbursed by UNESCO.

Conditions and duration

25. Telecommuting is approved for an initial period not exceeding six (6) months, renewable for periods of up to six (6) months at a time.

26. To be considered for telecommuting, employees must demonstrate the ability to work efficiently, to establish priorities and to manage effectively their own time.
27. Employees authorized to telecommute shall:
 - a. Be contactable by the communication tools and applications used by the Organization during the agreed working hours;
 - b. Be aware that supervisors may also require them to report to the office for work-related meetings and other events at their own expense and with reasonable notice, if alternative methods of communication and representation are not suitable and direct face-to-face interaction is necessary for the implementation.
 - c. Be responsible and accountable for the timely completion of tasks/assignments, and for submitting the agreed work products/completed assignments on time.
 - d. Be able to continue to supervise their team(s) effectively.

Location

28. The telecommuting location may be the employee's home or another workplace outside the office premises, within commuting distance. Employees should communicate the telecommuting location as part of their Telecommuting Agreement. Any exceptions, such as those based on compelling reasons shall be cleared by DIR/HRM.
29. Normally, requests for telecommuting from outside commuting distance will not be entertained.
30. The commuting distance differs from one duty station to another. The Director/ Head of Field/Liaison Office/ Institute defines the areas which are considered to be within commuting distance for the purpose of this policy.
31. Employees shall be responsible for the safety and security of the telecommuting location.

Conditions of service

32. Telecommuting does not affect the nature of an employee's contract, nor his/her conditions of service. Leave provisions (e.g. annual and sick leave, and the rules relating to official holidays) shall apply in exactly the same way to telecommuters. Telecommuters remain subject to the UNESCO Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, and/or HR Manual, as applicable under their contract modality, as if they were working on the office premises.
33. Telecommuters are bound by the terms of Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service while working at the telecommuting location, and are subject to the same restrictions relating to outside activities as other employees.

G. Approving Flexible Working Arrangements

34. Employees should discuss their request for flexible working arrangements with their supervisor in advance. A combination of two or more flexible working arrangement modalities may be authorized. In considering requests for flexible working arrangements, the supervisor should take into account the unit's business needs and accommodate as much as possible the needs of team members in an equitable and balanced manner.
35. Employees who wish to apply for telecommuting and/or flexible working hours shall complete the Flexible Working Arrangements Agreement Form ([HR Form 16-1](#)) and submit it to their supervisor. Employees are responsible for informing their team and other parties of the approved flexible working arrangements.

Approval authority

36. Flexible work arrangements are approved in writing and monitored by the supervisor.
37. The approval of flexible working arrangements is linked to a specific position. When the employee takes up a different position, his/her flexible working arrangement will be discontinued, and he/she will be required to submit a new request. Any existing arrangement cannot automatically be carried over a new post/assignment. Incoming supervisors also have the right to re-assess existing arrangements.
38. The supervisor or the employee may request that a flexible working arrangement be deferred, suspended, modified or discontinued, normally with a 10 working days' notice, if either the supervisor considers that the needs of UNESCO necessitate the return to normal working arrangements, or the needs of the employees have changed. Failure to adhere to the terms of the arrangement or in case of underperformance, may also necessitate such suspension or discontinuation. Given that the granting of a flexible working arrangement is subject to the exigencies of service, its renewal shall be assessed by the supervisor. As such, it does not carry any expectation of renewal.

H. Insurance

39. Staff members authorized to telecommute will be covered by UNESCO's Staff Compensation Plan in the event of illness, injury or accidental death attributable to the performance of official duties. The provisions of [HR Manual Item 7.4 \(Staff Compensation Plan\)](#) shall apply accordingly.
40. Employees, other than those covered by UNESCO Staff Compensation Plan, authorized to telecommute will not be

covered under the Organization's liability policy whilst working from the telecommuting location. It is the employee's individual responsibility to ensure adequate personal liability coverage as part of their household insurance, in case of personal accidents or injury.

I. Monitoring

41. HRM will monitor the use of telecommuting arrangements. Sectors/Services, Bureaux/ (Field/Liaison) Offices/ Institutes will report to HRM on the use of flexible working hours and breaks for external learning activities' arrangements.

¹ [By definition, consultants and other specialist contractors, are expected to work off-site.](#)



Procedures

Staff Regulations

Staff Rules

Circulars

Key Documents

Forms

1. [HR Form 16-1 - Flexible Working Arrangements Agreement](#)

Links

1. [TULIP](#)

Appendices