



Dear Secretary-General

We have received a copy of your memo to heads of entities requesting that they require staff to be in the office a minimum of four days a week.

We have concerns with your memo and approach for the following reasons and will be advising staff accordingly.

- This memo, which has the effect of changing the practical application of previously issued policy and agreements between staff members and their supervisors, was neither discussed nor consulted with, nor communicated to staff representatives through the established staff-management consultation mechanisms, including the Staff-Management Committee (SMC). This is yet another example of a lack of consideration for staff representatives and by extension the staff they represent; staff who take enormous pride in their work and serve in some of the world's most dangerous locations.
- The memo claims this move is pushed by member states without showing evidence. On the contrary, the relevant General Assembly resolution on the matter was focused on adjustments to compensation in the case of extended remote working rather than mandating a general return to office attendance.
- The memo also takes no account of the circumstances facing some of the offices where you have issued your request, and at which staff are currently sheltering from bombs or evacuated to safe zones. Attendance at the office and on-site physical presence is the least of their and their managers' concerns.
- At a time when the Middle East is at war and people across the world are calling on the UN to take action, it seems strange to focus efforts and resources in this area.
- The flexible working policy was issued as part of a strategy to save on office space. Many offices have cancelled leases and squeezed more staff into a smaller space using open-office hotdesking. As managers have told us, these offices cannot accommodate your request. Costs would rise by \$5,000 to 10,000 per staff member to rent additional workspaces. In the meantime staff cannot be expected to spend time looking for empty spaces while they have work to do.

- The nature of work has changed. Staff are increasingly engaged in video calls that require closed spaces. Meetings take place with counterparts around the world at times that would otherwise be used for commuting. Existing UN office infrastructure, despite in many cases being introduced in the last ten years, is no longer fit for purpose.
- Staff surveys and studies have shown higher productivity with hybrid arrangements that provide equal time in office and out of office. This enables staff to serve the people of the world better and is in line with industry practice. Reversing the clock and prioritising the presence in unfit, noisy and at times dilapidated offices, reduces productivity and value to the taxpayer.
- The current framework under ST/SGB/2019/3 empowers managers to decide what works best for their teams taking into account contact with member states, the specific functions, the nature of the work and the flexibility required with regards to hours. Managers have not complained and in no way wish to become police officers on office attendance.
- Hybrid working has also enabled staff, especially women and single parents, to more easily combine work and family life, in line with the Organization's broader commitments on gender equality and inclusion. The current framework was part of your gender parity strategy and it seems contradictory that as a gender champion you chose International Women's Day to reverse it, returning to a system that benefited men for decades
- Hybrid working has also enabled the easier integration of colleagues with disabilities into the workplace. You recently produced a disability inclusion strategy for this very purpose.
- Your memo also takes the UN in the opposite direction to many employers. Turning back the clock won't attract younger talent, nor position the UN as a future-focused organisation, something UN 2.0 and UN80 have been trying to do.

Overall we do not believe that performative measures will fix the UN's predicament. We instead urge you to take a more strategic approach to making the UN relevant and fit for purpose. In doing so we request that you cancel the memo, empower managers and allow staff to focus on results. We of course stand ready to discuss the issue at Staff-Management Committee, taking into account evidence and dedicating the necessary time for reflections.

Yours sincerely,

UN Secretariat Staff Unions and Associations:

ECA Staff Union

ECLAC Staff Association

ESCAP Staff Association

UNOG Staff Union & Outposted Offices

UN Nairobi Staff Union / UNEP & UN-HABITAT GLOBAL