Resolution on the Next Normal

The 47th Staff Council,

Commending the leadership of the Secretary-General throughout the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic;

Noting with appreciation the issuance of the Secretary-General’s plan for the Next Normal, developed with the active involvement of the Staff Union and consisting of 13 workstreams, ranging from work modalities to occupational safety and health to organizational culture and learning, with an emphasis on a hybrid working model;

Emphasizing the critical importance of the views of New York-based staff on the Next Normal, as explicitly expressed in the results of the survey conducted by the United Nations Staff Union (New York) (UNSU-NY) from 28 March to 8 April 2022 (see attached executive summary);

Noting that such views must be fully taken into account by the Organization as part of the Next Normal and, as such, are reflected in the present resolution as the official position of UNSU-NY for New York-based staff on this matter;

Recalling its views on COVID-19 related matters as expressed in its resolution No. 47/06, adopted on 19 August 2021; resolution No. 47/10, adopted on 9 September 2021; resolution No. 47/15, adopted on 14 December 2021; resolution 47/16, adopted on 21 December 2021; and resolution 47/17, adopted on 20 January 2022;

Emphasizing also the importance for the Organization to fully implement applicable international labour norms and standards, as well as the specific recommendations from the International Labour Organization as set forth in their publication Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: A Practical Guide;

Emphasizing that the safety and health of all United Nations Secretariat personnel must remain a paramount consideration for the determination of any work-related arrangements by the Organization;

Acknowledging the dedication and sacrifice of the staff serving on-site throughout the pandemic;

---

1 Document entitled “Next Normal – Reimagining how we work @ UNHQ”, circulated to New York-based staff by the Secretary-General on 31 March 2022.
The Staff Council hereby:

1. **Concurs** with the Secretary-General’s plan for the Next Normal and, to strengthen its implementation, proposes additional recommendations as set forth in the present resolution;

2. **Recommends** that any standard three-day telecommuting request be approved by default, and only rejected when the Second and First Reporting Officers formally certify in writing that such a request is not compatible with functional requirements;

3. **Calls on** all Departments and Offices to abide by the provisions of the current Flexible Working Arrangements policy without undue restrictions on the number of telecommuting days and also calls on the Office of Human Resources, in the Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, to scrutinize those instances in which additional restrictions are applied;

4. **Recommends** that requests for telecommuting away from the duty station be handled on a case-by-case basis, including for periods of over 12 months, and that that section 3.10 of the Secretary-General’s bulletin on Flexible working arrangements⁴ be amended accordingly;

5. **Recommends**, in line with guidance from the International Labour Organization,⁴ the reimbursement of costs of electricity, communication, heating and/or air conditioning, and other telework-specific costs when staff are working from home;

6. **Recommends**, in line with guidance from the International Labour Organization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,⁵ the reimbursement of actual costs incurred in purchasing the tools and equipment used for teleworking since March 2020, or a lump sum payment for staff to purchase the necessary equipment for their home-based working;

7. **Recommends** that flexible open plan/hot-desking and shared workplace arrangements be phased out and replaced by cubicles or private offices assigned on a rotational basis with an online reservation system;

8. **Recommends** that funds be allocated to improve workspaces, along the lines of paragraph 8 above, through the reallocation of expected savings from the end of several leases and related building rental costs;

9. **Encourages** the Secretary-General and lead departments and offices to provide regular updates, including through townhalls and open discussion sessions, on progress in implementing the various Next Normal Workstreams, in particular on Information and communication technologies and cybersecurity, facilities and real estate, occupational safety and health, mental health, and organizational culture and learning; and **pledges** the Staff Union’s support in ensuring that the implementation of the Next Normal is fully participatory;

10. **Instructs** the leadership to share this resolution with the members of the Occupational Safety and Health Committee at Headquarters, as well as with the Chef de Cabinet, the Under-Secretaries-Generals of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Safety and Security, as well as the

---

³ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., p. 9.
Assistant-Secretary-General of the Office of Human Resources and all heads of offices/departments represented in the Staff Council; and

11. *Further instructs* the leadership to circulate this resolution via an email broadcast to all members of the United Nations Staff Union.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adopted</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstention</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

The United Nations Staff Union (New York) conducted a survey of New York-based Secretariat staff from 28 March to 8 April 2022 on aspects connected to the Next Normal and return to premises. The fundamental purpose of this initiative was to ensure that the voices of staff can be heard and channeled by the Staff Union in the implementation phase of the Next Normal. As such, the survey covered new patterns of work established during the pandemic, telecommuting, space requirements on return to premises, and other concerns related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Of the approx. 6,500 New York-based constituents who were invited to participate, 2,485 responded. This 38% response rate is considered very high and statistically relevant. See the full list of survey questions.

87% of respondents expressed support for standard telecommuting requests within policy to be approved by default, and only rejected when the organization can formally certify that such requests are not compatible with functional requirements. A significant majority (60%) stated that the standard maximum number of telecommuting days should be increased (i.e., more than three days per week). Regarding telecommuting away from the duty station, a majority of respondents (44%) believed it should be handled on a case-by-case basis, including for periods of over 12 months.

Overall, the main advantages of telecommuting were avoiding commuting time and costs (90%), reduced exposure to COVID-19 (89%), and increased efficiency and productivity (77%). This is particularly significant given that most staff (68%) commute for more than one hour, and a significant number more than two hours (26%) when working from the office. At the same time, telecommuting has a negative impact for some respondents in terms of the lack of personal interaction (47%) and unlimited working hours (46%).

In this context, a significant number of respondents stated that the organization could facilitate telecommuting by providing a fixed amount to all personnel (39% of respondents) or the reimbursement of relevant costs (also 39%). A majority of respondents (60%) also stated that their home office set-up is comparable or better than on UN premises. 50% of respondents stated that flexible open plan / hot-desking and shared workplace arrangements should not be maintained. The main recommendation was that it be replaced by assigned cubicles or private offices (48% of respondents).

The three main services that respondents wanted under the Next Normal were: a lump-sum payment for home office equipment (49%); safe drinking stations (41%); and reallocating building rental costs to significantly improve workspaces, including by having individual offices as a standard (38%).