

Flexible Working Arrangements for the United Nations

WHY IT MAKES SENSE

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) are mutually beneficial arrangements between personnel and managers in which both parties agree on when, where and how work is executed. At the United Nations, FWAs have the potential to improve resource efficiency, foster organizational resilience and improve the quality of outputs.

The Secretary General's *System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity* underlined the importance of FWAs for the entire UN system. The Enabling Environment Guidelines put forth recommendations and best practices to support their implementation.

1. Cost savings - resource efficiency

- Counter to common fears that staff will work less if doing so from home, a recent study by Oxford University Press reported that people working from home achieved a 13 per cent **productivity improvement** over their office-based counterparts.ⁱ
- With the introduction of FWAs, organizations can recruit from a broader and more diverse talent pool. A vast majority (76%) of employersⁱⁱ feel that implementing flexible working practices has a **positive impact on staff retention**. Reduced employee turnover also means reduced costs.
- Employees who are trained and experienced with FWAs can work when and where they are most productive, cut down on commuting time and **increase productivity** by reducing distractions.

13%

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Case I: Flexible working for senior executives

Robert Bosch GmbH is a market leader multinational engineering company employing some 400,000 people in 50 countries. Bosch has long-term experience of implementing flexible working time models, such as the MORE (Mindset Organisation Executives) scheme. The project aims at promoting wider use of flexible working amongst executives (working from home or part-time) over a period of three months, promoting new approaches to leadership based on results, rather than being present in the workplace. More than 800 executives participated in the project worldwide and 80% of them continued working flexibly afterwards. The scheme enhanced performance and contributed to achieving greater gender equality at the level of executives.ⁱⁱⁱ

2. Business continuity and organizational resilience

- FWAs can improve organizational agility and responsiveness to change. Public sector employers that implement flexible working report a positive impact on **business continuity**,^{iv} through the development of the necessary skills and confidence by staff and managers.
- Several institutions have started to implement **continuity programs**, including flexible working, to prepare for disruption as experienced during the extreme weather patterns of recent years. Modelling from the private sector shows that if people cannot go to work and are not trained or experienced to work from home, the financial loss to the company is substantial. For the US Federal Government, teleworking has become the cornerstone of their continuity program.^v

“The case for flexible working is clear - a more dynamic and happier workforce is often a more productive one, with a wider range of skills and a greater likelihood of staying within the organization. As both society and technology progress, the future of work is becoming one where flexible working is more widely adopted, and it is our responsibility to ensure that Defence keeps pace with our people’s expectations of the offer of a modern employer, without compromising the delivery of Defence outputs.”

- Lieutenant General Richard Nugee - Chief of Defence People British Armed Forces^{vi}

3. Quality of output and productivity

- Empowering employees to negotiate their most effective time and place of work enhances the **quality of their output** and leads to fewer errors.
- Employees working in high trust organizations report 74% less stress, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement and 40% less burnout, all of which feed into **efficiency gains** for the organization.^{vii}
- FWAs contribute to a greater **innovation capacity** of individuals and teams, arising from improved working conditions, interpersonal relationships and transparency. 73% of employers report a positive impact of flexible working on employee motivation and 72% report that flexible working positively affects levels of employee engagement.^{viii}

Case II: Improving productivity and reducing traffic congestion through flexibility

Sri Lanka ran a 3-months pilot of flexible working hours^{ix} for public servants in Battaramulla in 2017. Cabinet approval was given for the plan, which was intended mainly to reduce traffic volume and congestion during peak times by shifting drivers to less congested hours and spreading out the peak period through staggered working hours and telecommuting opportunities. Commuting to the capital from the suburbs can take up to 2-3 hours in the morning, and even longer in the evening. According to experts, the level of traffic congestion could affect the productivity of the national economy (e.g. reduce the cost of overtime and sick leave for institutions).

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