

**Frequently Asked Questions
Related to
Reimbursement of expenses related to the cancellation or disruption of official travel in connection
with the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak**

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I. CANCELLATION OF PLANNED OFFICIAL TRAVEL

1. **What do I do if my planned travel must be cancelled before I start my travel?** In the event that the authorized official travel must be cancelled for reasons related to COVID-19 travel restrictions or official meeting/event/mission cancellations, travellers/travel administrators are to request cancellation of the related Umoja travel request¹. The following conditions may apply:
 - a. **Air Ticket Expenses (UN purchased)**. The applicable Travel Processing Office (TPO) will process the cancellation request in Umoja and will seek reimbursement/refund of the ticket expenses, as applicable, through their contracted travel agency.
 - b. **Air Ticket Expenses (Self-Ticket Option)**. As detailed in ST/IC/2019/16, the traveller will be responsible for managing any associated change and refund requests directly with the ticket provider from whom they made the purchase. Should the traveller not be able to recover the actual costs incurred, in part or in full, the traveller may be reimbursed, not to exceed the maximum reimbursable amount approved by the TPO for purchase of the ticket.
2. **What do I do if I had a deviation from the official itinerary for personal convenience already booked and paid for, in connection with my official travel?** The United Nations shall only be responsible for the portion of the official travel that is related to the applicable, official itinerary. The United Nations is not financially responsible for any costs or damages incurred by the traveller related to the deviation for personal convenience – including, but not limited to, cancellation or changes to flights.
3. **What do I do if I had incurred additional expenses related to my official travel and my trip is now cancelled?** Should a traveller have incurred additional expenses related to their official travel (e.g. prepaid hotel charges) for which the traveller is not able to recover, in part or in full, depending on the types of expenses incurred, some may be reimbursed by allowing the traveller to keep part or all of the DSA. Maximum reimbursable amounts for DSA related expenses (lodging, meals and incidentals) will be as per established rates. Reimbursement of other expenses would be reviewed on a case by case basis.
4. **What documents do I need to provide to support my travel claims in the event my official travel is cancelled?** All claims for reimbursement in the expense report must be supported by a scanned copy of the invoice paid by the traveler. In addition, a copy of the written notification cancelling the travel must be provided. The expense report must include evidence of prepaid services or accommodation as well as confirmation that the payments are non-refundable.

¹ Further details are available in the relevant Umoja travel job aid, available at: <https://umoja.un.org/content/travel-job-aid>

5. **What do I do if I decide to cancel my travel for personal concerns related to the COVID-19 outbreak, before I start my travel?** There may be cases where the official meeting/event/mission, for which the travel was intended, is not cancelled, but the traveler decides not to travel due to personal concerns over potential COVID-19 transmission. In such cases costs will be reimbursed subject to the conditions as set out above for air tickets, personal deviations and additional expenses.

II. DISRUPTION TO INITIATED OFFICIAL TRAVEL

6. **What do I do if my travel must be cancelled/changed after I start my travel?** In the event that the authorized itinerary must be changed for reasons related to COVID-19 travel restrictions or cancellations of official meeting/event/mission cancellations, the following conditions may apply:
 - a. Air Ticket Expenses (UN purchased). The traveller/travel administrator should contact the relevant Travel and Shipments Approver (TSA) (i.e. Certifying Officer) and request an amendment be made to the approved Umoja travel request (for the official itinerary portion only). Once approved, the applicable TPO will work through their contracted travel agency to make the required changes to the ticket. Should the situation be urgent in nature, the traveller should ensure they have their duty station's after hours/duty officer contact details to allow quick processing of any required changes to UN purchased tickets.
 - b. Air Ticket Expenses (Self-Ticket Option). As detailed in ST/IC/2019/16, the traveller will be responsible for managing any associated change directly with the ticket provider from whom they made the purchase. The traveller should coordinate with their TSA to ensure that any proposed changes to the official itinerary are approved. Should the traveller not be able to recover the actual costs incurred for the change, in part or in full, the traveller may be reimbursed, not to exceed the maximum reimbursable amount approved by the TPO for purchase of the ticket.
7. **What do I do if I had a deviation from the official itinerary for personal convenience already booked and paid for, in connection with my official travel, which has already started, and must be cancelled/changed?** The United Nations shall only be responsible for the portion of the official travel that is related to the applicable, official itinerary. The United Nations is not financially responsible for any costs or damages incurred by the traveler related to the deviation for personal convenience – including, but not limited to, cancellation or changes to flights.
8. **What do I do if I had incurred additional expenses related to my official travel, which has already started, and must be /changed?** Should a traveller have incurred additional expenses related to their official travel (e.g. prepaid hotel charges) for which the traveller is not able to recover, in part or in full, depending on the types of expenses incurred, some may be reimbursed by allowing the traveller to keep part or all of the DSA. Maximum reimbursable amounts for DSA related expenses (lodging, meals and incidentals) will be as per established rates. Reimbursement of other expenses would be reviewed on a case by case basis.

9. **What documents do I need to provide to support my travel claims in the event my official travel, which had already started, must be changed?** All claims for reimbursement in the expense report must be supported by a scanned copy of the invoice paid by the traveler. In addition, a copy of the written notification cancelling the travel must be provided. The expense report must include evidence of prepaid services or accommodation as well as confirmation that the payments are non-refundable.
10. **What do I do if I decide to curtail or change my official travel for personal concerns related to the COVID-19 outbreak, after I start my travel?** There may be cases where the official meeting, event or mission for which the travel was intended is not cancelled, but the traveller decides to curtail or change the trip due to personal concerns over potential COVID-19 transmission. In such cases costs will be reimbursed subject to the conditions as set out above for air tickets, personal deviations and additional expenses.
11. **I purchased travel insurance for my self-ticket. Do I get reimbursed for the travel insurance, if the official travel, which has already started, must be changed?** Insurance is not part of the cost of the ticket, thus may not be reimbursed.

III. DAILY SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE PROVISIONS

12. **Will I receive DSA if departure from the official business travel destination is not possible?** If during the authorized travel on official business, local authorities or United Nations guidelines do not allow departure, Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) applicable for the official travel destination will remain payable until departure is authorized and up until the first available flight and in accordance with the provisions of ST/AI/2014/2.
13. **Will I receive DSA if re-entry into duty station is not possible?** If authorities at the duty station or United Nations guidelines do not allow re-entry, DSA applicable for the official travel destination will continue to be payable until re-entry to the duty station is possible and up until the first available flight and in accordance with the provisions of ST/AI/2014/2. Where required due to operational and/or medical reasons, staff members travelling on official business could be sent to an alternative location. DSA for that location will then be payable.
14. **What if I get sick during official business travel?** If the staff member falls sick, while on travel on official business travel, including with COVID-19, DSA, if applicable, would continue to be payable and subject to the provisions of ST/AI/2014/2. However, if hospitalized, DSA will be reduced to one third.
15. **What if I get quarantined during official business travel?** If the staff member is quarantined while on official business, DSA will remain payable under the same conditions as paragraph 15 above.
16. **What additional supporting documents do I need to provide to claim for additional DSA?** A copy of the written communication authorizing extended stay in the official travel destination. The expense report should contain the corresponding changes in duration of stay together with sufficient supporting documentation.

17. How do I claim for additional DSA? All claims for additional DSA are to be made through the associated expense report in Umoja, following the return of the traveller to their origin. An advance payment of DSA maybe authorized for an extended stay.

IV. HOME LEAVE, FAMILY VISIT AND EDUCATION GRANT TRAVEL

18. Can I exercise my Home Leave, Education Grant Travel, or Family Visit if the authorized place of travel is impacted? Following standard procedure, flexibility will be exercised to authorize advance and deferred home leave (HL), family visit (FV) and education grant travel (EGT). Flexibility will also be exercised to allow separate HL travel of staff members and eligible family members, and to exercise HL/FV at an alternate location, if local authorities of the HL/FV country do not authorize entry or medical facilities are not adequate, and subject to the cost duty station-recognized place of HL/FV duty station and in accordance with the provisions of ST/AI/2000/15, ST/AI/2015/2.Rev1, ST/AI/2018/1/Rev.1, ST/AI/2018/2 and ST/AI/2013/3.

19. What is my financial responsibility if I avail of the lumpsum option for HL/FV/EGT? Staff members must be aware that respective local authorities or United Nations guidelines may at any time prevent either departure from the HL/FV/EGT destination or re-entry to the duty station. In such cases, staff members should take this into consideration when accepting the lump sum option, as in such cases they agree to waive all entitlements relating to HL//FV/EGT travel that would otherwise have been payable (i.e. there shall be no reimbursement of lost tickets when the staff member has availed of the lump sum option). Staff members are reminded to abide by the provisions of ST/AI/2013/3 and ST/IC/2019/16.

20. What do we do in the event we are subject to travel restrictions while on home leave, family visit or education grant travel? When staff members are not authorized by the local authorities or United Nations Guidelines to depart from the HL/FV destination and they or any of their family members are not sick with suspected COVID-19, the relevant provisions of the Administrative Guidelines for Covid-19 will apply, including, but not limited to telecommuting, reporting for duty at a UN system office at the same HL/FV location or another location. If these options are not possible, staff members may request additional Annual Leave or advance Annual Leave or SLWOP. SLWOP may be considered in exceptional circumstances. Payment of DSA will be made in accordance with the provisions of the Administrative Guidelines for Covid-19 and ST/AI/2014/2.

21. What about R & R travel? Can I still go? Programme Managers are encouraged to allow staff members to avail of R&R. Staff members must be aware that respective local authorities or United Nations guidelines may, at any time, prevent either departure from or re-entry to the duty station. Further details on R&R will follow in a dedicated Q&A document.

22. What happens with the travel of new recruits? The decision as to whether to initiate onboarding and reassignment of staff should be made in accordance with the national travel advisories set by the host country and taking into consideration WHO guidelines. This should be done in conjunction with the Senior Crisis Management Structure relevant to the duty station.

23. Who has delegated authority to make decisions for travel? In accordance with ST/SGB/2019/2, Heads of Entity have been delegated authority to authorize official travel and authorize miscellaneous travel expenses.

24. In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak, when travel is authorized in accordance with the needs of the Organization as determined by the Head of Entity, may such entity request the issuance of either flexible or fully refundable tickets, which in most cases will not be the most economical tickets, and hence would be out of policy (ST/AI/2013/3)? The Organisation needs to abide by the provisions of the Staff Rule 7.6 (f). If travel is deemed necessary, the following process is recommended if a traveler or a Travel and Shipment Approver (TSA) (i.e. Certifying Officer) requests the issuance of a flexible or fully refundable ticket:

- The Travel Processing Office will establish the cost of the ticket and standard of accommodation in line with policy.
- The Travel Management Company (TMC) (i.e. Travel Agency) will book the itinerary in line with policy based on the information provided on the Travel Request and in line with current policy.
- The TMC will advise the traveler of the restrictions/penalties of the booked air fare class.
- If the traveler/travel arranger requests a flexible or fully refundable ticket, the TMC will advise the relevant Travel Processing Office accordingly.
- The Travel Processing Office, in turn, will send an email to the TSA advising of the request for a flexible or fully refundable ticket and the additional cost for the different ticket.
- The TSA will either approve the request and amend the TR accordingly, as well as document the decision providing sound justification why the additional expenses are in the financial and operational interest of the Organization, or the TSA will decline the request.

25. To what extent is the strict adherence to the advance purchase policy applicable during the current COVID-19 outbreak? In accordance with ST/AI/2013/3, any failure to abide by the advance purchase policy requires justification and certification by the Programme Manager. If travel is deemed necessary/critical by the respective entity, the entity should continue to raise a travel request as early as possible but may request to hold off on the actual issuance of the ticket. Should additional funds be needed by the time ticket issuance is requested, as the ticket cost may have increased from the time of the approval of the request, the TSA will have to amend the travel request in Umoja and certify the additional expenses. Should the additional expenses not be available or deemed too high for the respective travel, the TSA should request the traveler to submit a trip cancellation request in Umoja. In such an emergency circumstances, benchmarks established under service level agreements of key performance indicators may be waived.