



8 July 2019

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**Information circular\***

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources

Subject: **Official travel**

1. The purpose of the present circular is to provide staff members with detailed information on official travel, which is governed by the provisions of administrative instruction [ST/AI/2013/3](#), as amended, on official travel (“the instruction”), or as superseded, and to familiarize staff members with the application of the Umoja travel module for official travel.

**Categories of travellers**

2. For the purposes of the present circular, the categories of travellers are:

(a) *Staff members*: travellers who hold a letter of appointment under the United Nations staff regulations and staff rules for either a temporary, fixed-term, continuing or permanent appointment;

(b) *Other travellers*: This category of individuals includes but it is not limited to family members of staff members, United Nations officials other than Secretariat staff members, members of organs or subsidiary organs of the United Nations, participants in advisory meetings, consultants, individual contractors, United Nations Volunteers and uniformed personnel.

**Primary consideration regarding whether face-to-face contact is required**

3. Prior to initiating official travel, staff members and other travellers, if applicable, in coordination with programme managers or Umoja travel and shipment approvers, must explore and confirm that direct face-to-face contact is indeed necessary, that all other alternative methods (such as videoconference, audioconference or other remote business methods) have been carefully reviewed and were found not to be effective, and that physical travel is therefore necessary. Only if physical travel is indeed required should an Umoja travel request be submitted.

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\* The present circular will be in effect until further notice and supersedes [ST/IC/2001/43](#), [ST/IC/2001/43/Add.1](#), [ST/IC/2001/43/Amend.1](#), [ST/IC/2001/43/Amend.2](#), [ST/IC/2001/43/Amend.3](#) and [ST/IC/2001/43/Amend.4](#).



**Authorization for official travel**

4. Staff members shall be responsible for ascertaining that they have the proper authorization before commencing travel. Prior to raising a travel request, staff members and other travellers, if applicable, must submit a corresponding absence request in the Umoja employee self-service time management module and obtain approval from their programme manager.

5. All travel at the Organization's expense for all categories of travellers must be processed through the Umoja travel module. Travel by commercial aircraft or train may not be procured via purchase order, contract or other means.

6. Travel undertaken at no expense to the Organization is subject to the travel policy of the Organization and requires the creation of an Umoja travel authorization or expense report in order to build a comprehensive travel history for the traveller and thus ensure that the administration can administer entitlements in a timely and correct manner.

**Trips that do not require the creation of a travel request prior to departure**

7. A travel request is not required to be created in Umoja by the traveller prior to departure if the following four conditions are met:

(a) No more than three nights of daily subsistence allowance (DSA) or mission subsistence allowance will be claimed by the traveller;

(b) No travel advance is required by the traveller;

(c) The mode of travel does not include passage on a commercial aircraft, train, bus or ferry purchased by the Organization in advance (in which case, adherence to the 16-day requirement in section 3.3 of the instruction is not necessary);

(d) No personal deviation is being requested.

8. However, a prior written authorization (such as email) from the programme manager continues to be required, in accordance with section 3.1 of the instruction.

9. Travellers covered under appendix D to the Staff Rules will continue to be covered as long as the travel was authorized or confirmed, pursuant to section 3.1 of the instruction, by the programme manager in writing (such as by email).

10. In these circumstances, the submission of a post facto stand-alone expense report in the Umoja travel module will suffice. Staff members and other travellers, if applicable, must submit a stand-alone expense report within seven working days of the trip end date.

**Purchase of tickets**

11. All travel agencies or travel management companies shall be contractually obliged to provide the most economical tickets available, in accordance with United Nations policies,<sup>1</sup> at the time of purchase.

12. Should a traveller become aware that a more economical ticket is available from a different source, the traveller may alert the respective travel processing office and provide supporting documents such as screen shots, quotations and any other relevant information. A meaningful comparison is normally only possible at the same time as ticket issuance, as the true cost of a ticket is only established at that point in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4.2 of the instruction, in accordance with staff rule 7.6 (f), requires the normal route for all official travel to be the most economical route available.

13. In this context, in establishing the authorized itinerary, due consideration should be given to the total cost of travel, (e.g. additional DSA required for stops and additional fees for services not included in some discount/basic fares, such as baggage fees and onboard meal) and not simply the ticket price.

#### **Advance purchase of tickets**

14. Pursuant to staff rule 7.8 and section 3.3 of the instruction, individuals travelling on behalf of the United Nations by commercial air paid for by the United Nations (including on self-ticketed itineraries that are reimbursed by the United Nations), should obtain the approval of the travel processing office for the Umoja travel request 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of official travel.

15. Five calendar days have been provided for obtaining the necessary travel request approvals in Umoja (from the travel and shipment approver, travel processing office and, when applicable, human resources partner). Staff members or travel administrators are therefore required to submit travel requests at least 21 calendar days prior to the commencement of travel, to ensure timely finalization of the travel arrangements in accordance with the instruction.

16. Staff members or travel administrators are required to provide a justification in Umoja for travel requests submitted less than 21 calendar days in advance of the commencement of travel. The travel and shipment approver is responsible for reviewing the justification provided and for seeking additional information and/or clarification, if deemed necessary.

#### **Medical clearances**

17. Prior to the start of travel, it is the traveller's individual responsibility to obtain the required medical clearances with the Health-Care Management and Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Department of Operational Support or the designated United Nations medical service.

18. Approvers and travel and shipment approvers are not required to ensure that medical clearance is obtained prior to the approval of the travel request, unless otherwise explicitly requested by the Health-Care Management and Occupational Safety and Health Division or the designated United Nations medical service to address possible emergencies (e.g. specific concerns in the region).

#### **Security clearances**

19. It is the traveller's individual responsibility to obtain the required security clearances prior to the commencement of all travel. Failure to obtain the required security clearance prior to travel may result in the traveller becoming ineligible to make a claim under the malicious acts insurance policy.

20. Approvers and travel and shipment approvers are not responsible to ensure that security clearance has or will be obtained and that the required security awareness training (such as BSAFE) has been completed prior to the approval of a travel request. However, they are to remind travellers of their obligation to obtain the security clearance and complete required training prior to travel.

#### **Discounted airfares and travel on United Nations aircraft**

21. In line with sections 4.2 and 4.6 of the instruction, discounted airfares, including restricted fares and travel on so-called "low-cost" carriers, are considered in the determination of the most economical route. The Organization does not exclude any air carriers owing to the lack of provision of services such as free checked baggage

or free on-board meals. However, any comparisons should be made in the context of the consideration of the total cost of travel, as set out in paragraph 13 above.

22. Travel on United Nations aircraft will count towards the computation of the total travel time of a journey for the purpose of determining the standard of accommodation, as long as it forms an integral leg of the total journey.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Deviations for personal convenience from the approved route, mode of transportation or standard of accommodation**

23. Staff members must indicate for themselves and/or for their eligible family members their intent to deviate for reasons of personal convenience from the approved mode, dates, route or standard of accommodation when submitting a travel request in Umoja, in accordance with chapter VII of the Staff Rules and section 7 of the instruction, as amended. By requesting the deviation in Umoja, the traveller will be provided information on the risks and conditions attached to a personal deviation (the relevant details are available in the Umoja travel request).

#### **Travel on training**

24. To ensure the correct application of the travel policy, all travellers whose travel is related to training must indicate in the “comments” section of the travel request whether they are travelling as “trainer” or “trainee”. This annotation will be validated during the travel and shipment approval process.

#### **Reimbursement of expenses during a forced stopover**

25. Travel on home leave and family visit shall be arranged in accordance with sections 6, 12 and 13 of the instruction. There is no entitlement to DSA for travel time on home leave and family visit. Actual costs for meals, accommodation and incidentals not exceeding the corresponding portions of the established DSA rate for the location are reimbursable for an authorized unavoidable stopover while on home leave or family visit, or education grant travel in cases in which the Organization has provided the air ticket and the airline does not provide meals or lodging.

#### **Terminal expenses**

26. Payment of terminal expenses is governed by section 9 of the instruction. Staff members are reimbursed terminal expenses for transportation between the airport or other point of arrival or departure and the hotel or other place of dwelling. For New York, the amounts to be reimbursed for each trip are \$78 in respect of the staff member and \$26 for each family member authorized to travel at the United Nations expense. For all other duty stations, the amounts to be reimbursed for each trip are \$47 in respect of the staff member and \$16 for each family member authorized to travel at the United Nations expense.

27. When an official United Nations, government or any other type of transport is made available free of charge for the trip, the amounts to be paid are set at \$14 in respect of the staff member and \$7 for each family member.

28. The normal mode of travel for all official travel is air travel, in line with staff rule 7.6 (c). In accordance with section 9.3 of the instruction, terminal expenses are deemed to cover all expenses for transportation between the airport or other point of arrival or departure and the hotel or other place of dwelling, including transfer of baggage and other related incidental charges. In this respect, “other point of arrival

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://tts.un.org> for specific examples of common business scenarios to which these provisions apply.

or departure” shall refer to locations other than an airport (e.g. train terminals) only when the mode or type of travel (e.g. train) has been approved as the alternative that fully replaces travel by air.

### **Miscellaneous travel expenses**

29. Section 10 of the instruction contains a list of the categories of non-receipted expenses under \$30 that may be reimbursed where authorized. Scanned receipts for claims described in this section are not required to be attached to the expense report but must be retained in line with paragraph 45 below. The “other forms of communication” referred to in section 10 (b) of the instruction include possible Internet connection charges. Furthermore, a flat fee of \$15 is reimbursable as a non-receipted expense in cases in which the airline does not provide meals free of charge on a flight that is longer than six hours.

### **Lump-sum option for travel on home leave, family visit or education grant travel**

30. Staff members who wish to exercise this option should initiate the travel request in Umoja at least two months in advance of the anticipated departure date and request information on the amount of the lump sum. The travel request will be routed to the human resources partner for review and approval of the entitlement and subsequently to the travel processing office, which will establish the lump-sum amount in accordance with section 12 of the instruction.

31. Once the staff member has been informed by the travel processing office about the amount of the lump sum for the requested travel, the staff member will have 10 business days to accept the lump sum or opt for a United Nations-provided air ticket, in Umoja. It is important to remember that if a response is not received within that time frame, the lump-sum option may not be granted.

32. All lump-sum calculations should be made by a travel processing office using a global distribution system and calculated in United States dollars. Guidelines for the determination of lump-sum payments can be found on the web page of the Travel and Transportation Section.<sup>3</sup>

### **Self-ticketing**

33. Staff members and other travellers, if applicable, may be authorized to purchase their own tickets (“self-ticket”) pursuant to staff rule 7.8. A self-ticketing option may be approved, regardless of the ticket value, when deemed to be in the best interest of the Organization<sup>4</sup> and subject to a maximum reimbursement amount established by the relevant travel processing office.

34. The following self-ticketing process is to be adhered to:<sup>5</sup>

(a) A travel request must be entered in Umoja, with detailed justification of the request for self-ticketing in the “comments” field;

(b) The travel and shipment approver will review and then endorse or reject the justification;

(c) The travel processing office will evaluate the request for self-ticketing and approve the request, if it is deemed advantageous to the Organization;

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<sup>3</sup> <http://tts.un.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Common scenarios for which a self-ticket option may be in the best interest of the Organization can be found at <http://tts.un.org>.

<sup>5</sup> Further details are available in the relevant Umoja travel job aid, available at: <https://umoja.un.org/content/travel-job-aids>.

(d) The travel processing office will communicate the maximum reimbursable amount calculated as the ticket portion of the amount authorized for the journey on the approved dates and by the approved mode, route and standard of travel to the staff member and other travellers, if applicable, so as to avoid any misunderstandings during the reimbursement process;

(e) In purchasing their tickets, staff members must comply with the approved dates, mode, route and standard of travel;

(f) Upon return from travel, the staff member and other travellers, if applicable, must submit an expense report in Umoja that is linked to the previously approved Umoja travel request for self-ticketing.

35. All requests for self-ticketing must be submitted well in advance, to ensure compliance with the 16-day advance purchase policy.

36. It is important to note that staff members and other travellers, if applicable, who purchase tickets without an approved travel request in Umoja risk not being reimbursed or only receiving partial reimbursement.

37. All claims for reimbursement in the expense report must be supported by a scanned copy of the invoice paid by the traveller, and the proof of travel should be retained by the staff member and other travellers, if applicable, in line with paragraph 45 below.

38. Charges for additional value-added services (e.g. premium seat selection and priority boarding) are the financial responsibility of the traveller and are not reimbursable.

39. In the event of any changes to the planned travel, the traveller is responsible for managing any associated change and refund requests directly with the ticket provider.

40. Travellers must also request and obtain security and medical clearances for their approved travel, where applicable, and ensure that visa and United Nations laissez-passer requirements are in order prior to travel.

#### **Travel advances**

41. As per section 11 of the instruction, travel advances will only include DSA and/or terminal expenses applicable to the category of the traveller. Advances for official business travel will be issued up to five days in advance of the travel date, whereas advances for lump sums can be issued from eight weeks prior to the travel date. No travel advances should be made for trips with a total duration of less than 24 hours. In cases in which such advances are required to avoid undue financial hardship on the traveller, the travel and shipment approver can manually enter the travel advance payable in the travel request.

42. No advance payment shall be made in respect of miscellaneous travel expenses, which may include costs incurred for self-ticketing. Such expenses should be claimed through the expense report functionality upon completion of the trip.

43. Once the travel processing office has approved the travel request, a travel advance can be paid only once by the system. Any additional travel advances must be requested offline from the local travel finance or travel claims team and will only be processed if it exceeds \$1,000; reimbursement for lesser amounts should be requested through the expense report upon completion of the trip.

#### **Travel claims**

44. Staff members are not required to attach a scanned copy of boarding passes (or a passenger manifest, in the case of United Nations aircraft) to the respective expense

report for any type of travel, except under exceptional circumstances (such as travel funded by donor grant) which may require the provision of the boarding pass as a scanned attachment. When travel is arranged on behalf of travellers who are not staff members, the travel administrator is responsible for retaining the original documents to support any claims.

45. Proof of travel and travel expenses must be retained by the staff member (or the travel administrator, if travel was arranged on behalf of a traveller who is not a staff member) for a period of five years, in line with the instruction.

46. Staff members and travel administrators must submit the expense report for their or their travellers' trips within two weeks of the authorized return travel date. The submission of an expense report is applicable for both ticket (including self-ticketing) and lump-sum options. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in an automatic recovery of the travel advance or lump sum through payroll for staff members. For non-staff, a credit memo will be placed against the travellers' vendor account, which will prevent future payments from being made until it is cleared by approval of the expense report.

47. Travellers are entitled to claim reimbursement for meals on the last day of official travel, against original receipts, and at a cost not exceeding the meals portion of the applicable DSA rate.

#### **Early check-in and/or late check-out to/from hotels**

48. In exceptional circumstances in which travel arranged or approved by the Organization results in a traveller incurring charges for having to check in early or check out late to or from a hotel, the traveller may claim reimbursement, assuming the travel request is duly approved and scanned receipts are attached to the expense report.<sup>6</sup> The traveller will be reimbursed the actual accommodation cost, not to exceed the accommodation portion of the standard DSA rate.

#### **Travel documents**

49. It is the traveller's responsibility to ensure that all required travel documents are valid and accurate and to obtain the necessary visa(s) for the destination, transit stops and return travel, where applicable, prior to departure. United Nations-issued travel documents (i.e. laissez-passer, United Nations certificate or family certificate) complement the holder's national passport, but do not replace government-issued travel documents. Further information on travel documents can be found in the Guide to the Issuance of United Nations Travel Documents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://tts.un.org> for specific examples of common business scenarios to which these provisions apply.

<sup>7</sup> Available via <http://tts.un.org>, or at <https://iseek-newyork.un.org/system/files/iseek/LibraryDocuments/593-2006012715561757377.pdf>.