

FWA Survey 2011

[Executive summary]

As follow-up to the baseline survey conducted in July/August 2009 on work life policy and practice, the Office of the Focal Point for Women conducted a second round of survey on the use of FWA (FWA) on the UN Secretariat intranet *iSeek* from December 2010 to January 2011. The purpose of the survey was to allow an assessment of where progress has occurred and where not, feeding into improved focus, as necessary.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. UN staff members awareness of the basic provisions of existing FWA policies has increased, but their knowledge is still average.

A majority of staff reported having good knowledge of the policies on compressed work schedule (26 per cent) and staggered working hours (25 per cent), and having average knowledge of scheduled break for external learning activities (25 per cent) and telecommuting (23 per cent).

2. Staff members are still not provided with information about the availability of FWA options at the UN.

- Most staff (37 per cent) stated that they had found out about FWA through articles on *iSeek*.
- However, while 38 per cent of staff members have not received any information about FWA options, most of those who have been provided with information received it from their colleagues (35 per cent) or immediate supervisors (20 per cent).

3. Staff use of FWA is not widespread

Most respondents (33 per cent) admitted that no one in their office was using FWA and 27 per cent stated that they did not know.

4. Staff do not know application procedures for FWA request

The majority of respondents (57 per cent) declared that they did not know the application procedures for FWA.

5. Staff opinion about FWA is predominantly positive.

- A large majority of staff (87 per cent) agreed that flexible work arrangements are simply a modern tool to allow persons to retain their productivity while increasing their flexibility in choosing a work method more compatible to their work life fit.
- Most staff members (72 per cent) understood that flexible work arrangements should be available to all persons irrespective of their situation if it maintains or increases productivity and work life fit/balance.
- A lesser majority (60 per cent) expressed that flexible work arrangements are for those who are responsible and will work anywhere to fulfill the needs of their job.

6. There is a very strong interest in using FWA among UN staff

A high percentage of staff admitted being very interested in using telecommuting (52 per cent), compressed work schedule (42 per cent), staggered working hours (41 per cent), and scheduled break for external learning activities (32 per cent).

7. Only a minority of staff members have actually requested the use of FWA.

- The majority of survey respondents (67 per cent) have not requested any FWA options during the past 12 months.
- A small number of staff have requested telecommuting (18 per cent), staggered working hours (10 per cent), compressed work schedule (9 per cent), and scheduled break for external learning activity (3 per cent).
- The main reasons for not requesting were related to concerns about perceptions of managers (25 per cent) and concerns about impact on future career opportunities (20 per cent).

8. Main reasons for requesting FWA are related to work efficiency, family, and commuting issues

Most staff members admitted that the top reasons for them to be most likely to request FWA were: work efficiency (55 per cent), other personal/family related reasons (46 per cent), commuting issues (43 per cent), and childcare responsibilities (40 per cent).

9. Most staff members whose FWA requests were denied were not provided with explanations

The majority of respondents (69 per cent) admitted that if one or more of their requests were denied, their supervisor did not provide the reasons for denying their request.

10. Staff members that have used/are using FWA have a high level of satisfaction with the option they had chosen.

- A large majority of respondents are very satisfied with telecommuting (176), staggered working hours (127), compressed work schedule (84), and scheduled break for external learning activity (69).

11. Most staff members have not requested work/life balance policies

- 78 per cent of respondents admitted they had not requested any work/life balance policies.
- Only a minority had requested family leave (4 per cent) and maternity leave (4 per cent).

12. Support for the use of FWA is still perceived as low in departments.

- Most staff members perceived senior management (324), middle management (308), and administration/executive office (432) as neutral towards the use of FWA in their departments.
- However, the majority of staff members (438) perceived that their colleagues were supportive.

13. Supervisors do little to promote the use of FWA in their departments.

- Most supervisors (58 per cent) have not taken any action to promote the use of FWA while 25 per cent have encouraged the use of FWA informally.
- Yet, 63 per cent of supervisors found that none of the FWA policies was difficult to implement in the office.

WAY FORWARD

Suggestions for improving the implementation of FWA include:

- *Increasing communication*: Presentations by OHRM to staff and managers in offices or departments where not many people participate
- *Promoting a results-driven environment*: The problem with implementation of FWA has nothing to do with the options available. FWA only works in a work environment that is entirely results driven, and unfortunately this is not the case at the UN Secretariat. Regardless of actual productivity - perceptions of professionalism at the UN are also dependant on notions of face time, and a visible presence in the office.
- *Follow up and monitoring* : An efficient way is to make sure that staff members who opt for FWA provide the quantity of work and number of hours required from all staff members by the Organization. Better planning of work to be done with clear and measurable deliverables is necessary to do this.