



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

3 June 2021

Dear New York-based Colleagues,

I am writing to update you on plans for a gradual return to the United Nations premises in New York and the resumption of in-person work in the coming months.

As you know, our premises have been open throughout the pandemic, and some staff have continued to work in-person, when their functions either could not be performed remotely, or when remote work would have impacted their effectiveness and efficiency. I thank these colleagues for their dedication and commitment; we all owe them a debt of gratitude. I also thank colleagues who have been working diligently remotely. Thanks to you, the critical work of the United Nations has continued without any major disruptions.

Since my last update on 22 April 2021 about the phased return to our premises, the COVID-19 positivity rate in New York has fallen significantly and vaccines have become widely available in the Tri-State Area and in New York City. The New York authorities at both City and State levels have announced that following their consideration of the relevant Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, restrictions on travel and gathering of people, including wearing of masks and physical distancing requirements, can now be eased in certain settings.

In line with these improved conditions and local guidelines, and following recommendations from the Senior Emergency Policy Team, I am pleased to inform you that as of 6 July 2021, the United Nations Headquarters in New York will meet the requirements to re-open fully for in-person business, subject to maximum building occupancy limits as applicable.

This means that from 6 July 2021, all personnel who have been working remotely five days a week since alternate working arrangements were mandated in March 2020 will be expected to gradually to return to the workplace. Among other things, this will enable us to provide the necessary support to Member States, who are keen to resume work in the United Nations building.

This does not mean a return en masse to the office in July; nor does it mean a reversion to pre-March 2020 working patterns. The transition to a full return will be gradual, and we are committed to learning the lessons of the past year. As a starting point, from 6 July 2021, all personnel will be expected to perform their functions on premises, one or more days a week, according to a schedule to be established by each team in consultation with their entity's occupational safety and health focal point.

All United Nations Staff Members in New York

I know that some of you, due to exceptional circumstances, might have agreed with your manager to return to the duty station at a date later than 6 July. In such circumstances, I am asking managers to honour these commitments, work permitting, and allow you to return no later than 1 September 2021. All personnel working away from the duty station must be back at UNHQ by this date. Exceptional individual cases will be handled by managers and, if needed, confidentially by the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health.

For the time being, we will maintain daily occupancy limits based on continuous risk assessment, which takes into consideration City and State guidance, as well as the vaccination status of United Nations personnel.

Your health, safety, security and well-being have been our priority throughout the pandemic, and this continues to be the case as we move into this new phase.

To support the transition, Human Resources Policy Guidance on the transition from Phase 2 to the Next Normal Return to the Workplace for New York Headquarters will be issued shortly. This Guidance will outline the applicable working arrangements for the transition, including what to expect upon return to the premises; helpful tips on how to work in hybrid teams; ways to support mental health; and overall health and safety measures that will continue to be in place within the premises during this period. Detailed guidance on occupancy parameters, in-person meetings and other arrangements will also be provided in due course.

I request all managers to continue to exercise flexibility and understanding when planning the physical return to the premises of their teams, and to honour commitments made prior to the date of the issuance of this message, subject to exigencies of service.

As personnel serving in New York, we are privileged to have access to effective vaccines through local vaccination programmes. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to get vaccinated, and to report your vaccination status to your managers and through the United Nations Earthmed Portal. This information will help to inform our planning. An increase in vaccination rates is expediting the easing of risk mitigation measures and applicable guidelines in the City. Getting an understanding of the vaccination ratio among United Nations personnel is important to inform decisions on conditions for increasing capacity on premises.

Looking ahead, I anticipate that many of the benefits of remote work will be incorporated into our future working patterns. A survey about the Next Normal will also guide our planning. I look forward to taking the next steps together with you.

Once again, thank you for the dedication, resilience, and adaptability you have demonstrated in advancing the work of the United Nations here and around the world in this challenging and rapidly changing environment.

I hope to see many of you in person soon.

Yours sincerely,

*with my warmest personal regards*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres', written in a cursive style.

António Guterres