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Official travel

Paper submitted by the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council to SMC VIII

This paper proposes improvements to the current travel policy in order to address concerns raised by staff. Depending on the item the changes would be implemented at the AI or guideline level.

Counting of travel time when part of the journey is not by air

The GA resolution is silent on the counting of travel time for official travel when part of the journey is not by air but for example along an arduous road for which there is no alternative means. Therefore the AI could include other forms of travel in the calculation of total journey time. There should be written guidelines on this.

Reasonable deviations

The rules allow for a deviation of up to four hours if it saves as little as one dollar. Sometimes the deviation can double the total journey time. There needs to be a reasonable way to balance the savings with the cost in terms of staff time lost by longer journey. The extra travel time that is imposed on a staff member translates into loss of productivity that is costly to the organization. There should be written guidelines on how such a balance can be struck.

Connection times

In certain cases and in order to come in under 11 hours total journey time, staff are being given unrealistically tight connection times. Even small delays by one flight can lead to staff being stranded, sometimes overnight. While we understand that connection times are provided by airlines, we also know that those times at certain airports, such as Paris, are not realistic and regularly lead to missed connections. Therefore there needs to be a reassessment of minimum connection times to ensure that itineraries are reasonable.

Approval of travel itineraries

For a meeting starting on a Monday staff may need to travel on a Sunday. While connections may exist that allow a staff member to travel late on a Sunday and therefore keep most of the day for their personal time, the existence of a cheaper itinerary earlier in the day leads to staff being asked to give up their whole Sunday to travel. Even when a staff member already has a commitment and has indicated this in their travel request they may still be told that their request to leave late Sunday is a personal deviation that they must pay for. Allowance should be made for prior personal commitments by staff if travel is required over the weekend or a holiday.

Approval of travel expenses

With regard to expense reports, there is a lack of consistency in approving expenses filed by staff member, especially concerning expenses that are not covered by the daily subsistence allowance but authorized by the staff rule 7.6 and ST/AI/2013/3. This includes:

- payment for early check-in or late checkout;
- food and beverage expenses on the last day of a mission;
- food and beverage expenses during airport layovers.
- Access to a lounge for rest or work purposes during long airport layovers.

Guidelines should be issued on this in line with prevailing practice.