



Chapter 6

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF

Supporting our staff

COMBATING RACISM AT UN GENEVA

In early 2022, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, adopted the Strategic Action Plan on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations Secretariat. UN Geneva also made the fight against racism and racial discrimination in the workplace one of its priorities. The Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya, established the Working Group on Addressing Racism in the Workplace, and in March she appointed an anti-racism advocate for UN Geneva.

The Working Group on Addressing Racism in the Workplace submitted recommendations to the Director-General in line with the Strategic Action Plan. The recommendations took into account staff input collected through staff focus groups and covered a range of issues such as recruitment and selection, performance management, formal and informal recourse, accountability and

training. These recommendations will be implemented gradually at UN Geneva.

A number of events were held and initiatives launched to raise awareness about these topics. These included a video series that featured staff sharing their personal experiences with racism and racial discrimination. The videos were sent to staff and made publicly available.

It is clear that starting a conversation about these issues has already shifted mindsets. UN Geneva will continue moving forward in addressing and eradicating the scourge of racism and racial discrimination in the workplace.

Scan the QR code to watch the series of videos of UN staff discussing their experiences of racism and racial discrimination.



Nzété Da-Sama-Itoua, Chief of Unit, Information Systems, in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, shares his experiences of racism and racial discrimination in a UN Geneva video.



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UN Geneva's workshop on implicit bias

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: UN GENEVA ADDRESSES IMPLICIT BIAS AND STEREOTYPE THREAT

This year, UN Geneva held two workshops focused on enhancing the workplace environment.

John Antonakis, a scientist from the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Lausanne, spoke about how subtle bias, such as bias regarding appearance, gender, age, ethnicity and more, can enter into judgment calls, and about the effect this has on career growth and other outcomes. Researcher Caryn Block, of Columbia University, explored the concept of stereotype threat, and how it affects an individual's performance in organizational settings.

The two workshops shared the same objectives: to provide an understanding of how implicit bias and stereotype threat can create obstacles and challenges within the workplace and to equip attendees with key strategies to reduce them.

The events were part of UN Geneva's commitment to making sure that everyone is given the same opportunity for success, regardless of their staff category, grade or level, gender, race, or other identities. By addressing these topics, UN Geneva continues to take steps towards creating an environment where everyone can contribute to their fullest potential without fear or prejudice.

The workshops were well received by participants, who left feeling inspired and better informed about how they can take action to build a more open and accepting work environment in their respective organizations.

INCREASING STAFF RESILIENCE

The UN Geneva Staff Counsellors Office aims to support a dynamic workplace, one where we can ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being. This is the foundation on which we can continue to develop our personnel and support them in carrying out their essential mandates.

UN staff are often required to work under pressure, with limited resources, and to perform roles that require energy and passion. UN Geneva understands the ever-increasing demands and offers support through the Staff Counsellors Office in many forms.

One initiative is to provide tailored workshops and webinars to teams, which this year focused on topics such as emotional intelligence, preventing burnout, and the mind-body connection. The Staff Counsellors Office also prioritized supporting managers and leaders to recognize signs and symptoms of unhealthy stress in their teams and to respond with compassion, empathy and a problem-solving approach.

This year, in collaboration with the Medical Service and human resources partners, the Staff Counsellors Office also supported the return to work of staff who had experienced long periods of illness. The illnesses included mental health conditions that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout, and physical illnesses that took an emotional toll.



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Panel discussion at UN Geneva on the mental health of interpreters. From left to right: Kira Kruglikova, Director of the Division of Conference Management at the UN Office at Geneva; Eliane Esther Bots, director of *In Flow of Words*; Marie Diur, Chief of the Interpretation Service at the UN Office at Geneva; and Alma Barghout, Chief of the Arabic Interpretation Section at the UN Office at Geneva. In addition, two speakers joined the discussion remotely: Besmir Fidahić, a former translator and interpreter at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and one of the interpreters featured in the film; and Manfred Nowak, Secretary-General of the Global Campus of Human Rights and former Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF INTERPRETERS

In May and again in October, UN Geneva hosted screenings of *In Flow of Words*, a documentary film that focuses on the experiences of three interpreters who served at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. Born and raised in the former Yugoslavia, and having been witnesses to the brutal wars of the 1990s, the interpreters needed to contend with their personal memories and traumas while maintaining neutrality and professionalism in their work.

Each film screening was followed by a question-and-answer session with the film's director, Eliane Esther Bots, as well as candid conversations about mental health with UN Geneva's interpreters. The film "brought to light issues that are often unknown to the general public, even sometimes to UN colleagues, and even to interpreters that do not work in this context", said Alma Barghout, Chief of the Arabic Interpretation Section at the UN Office at Geneva, who moderated the discussion.

Scan the QR code to watch a recording of the May panel discussion.



BUILDING AWARENESS ABOUT STROKE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In May, UN Geneva hosted an expert panel discussion to raise awareness about strokes and the physical and mental consequences they can have on survivors of any age. The event took place at the Palais des Nations and online, with the participation of medical experts from UN Geneva, the University of Geneva and other institutions.

Among the speakers featured were Louis Gustin, a disability policy officer in the Government of France, and Elise Mathy, an endocrinologist. Louis was a stroke survivor at a young age and Elise supported him on his path to recovery. The two speakers and other advocates presented a moving account of recovering from stroke and living with its consequences.

Scan the QR code to watch a recording of the discussion.



Endocrinologist Elise Mathy (left) and disability policy officer Louis Gustin (right) speak about Louis's experience of recovering from a stroke at a young age.



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CREATING ANOTHER #NEWWORK HUB BEYOND GENEVA

With interest in UN Geneva’s #NewWork initiative continuing to gather pace across the United Nations Secretariat, in 2022 we supported colleagues in East Africa in establishing another regional #NewWork hub. In June, the global #NewWork team, which included UN Geneva colleagues, led a week-long programme in Nairobi for colleagues in the United Nations Secretariat and regional peacekeeping missions. Participants were introduced to #NewWork and tools to support new ways of working, and many of them have committed to continue with #NewWork activities.

The adoption of #NewWork at another regional hub demonstrates UN Geneva’s continued leadership in this sphere, and builds on previous work, including the introduction of #NewWork at United Nations Headquarters, in New York, and at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok.



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UN colleagues take part in a #NewWork programme in Nairobi.



What is #NewWork?

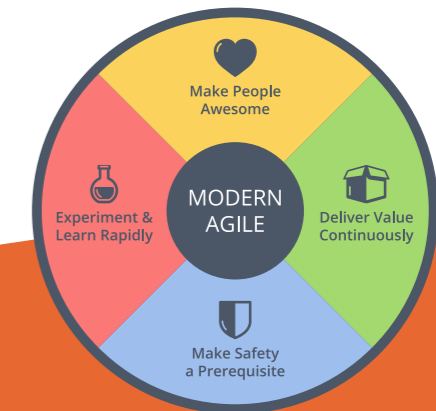
#NewWork is a global staff-driven initiative that originated in Geneva with the support of UN Geneva management, and is aimed at changing our workplace culture and creating “the UN we want”. Drawing on staff feedback, #NewWork articulates a vision, goals and an action plan to achieve a collaborative environment, empowered networks of staff, an organization that is fit for the future, a culture of innovation and a flexible working environment. From driving the adoption of collaborative technologies and new meeting techniques to launching innovation events, improving our service to clients and promoting flexible working arrangements, #NewWork has already delivered many positive changes to the way we work.

EMPOWERING TEAMS THROUGH THE MODERN AGILE APPROACH

In 2022, the human resources team of UN Geneva’s #NewWork initiative strengthened its support for teams by launching three training modules that use the Modern Agile approach. The modules aim to build on an existing appetite for new ways of working, and introduce a wider group of staff and managers to different ways of interacting, experimenting and collectively delivering on their tasks in order to eventually become more efficient and adaptive to change and challenges.

Starting with introductions to “Modern Agile” principles and to an “Agile mindset”, the training provided teams with tools to put all the principles into practice and to ensure that behavioural changes are sustainable. More than 340 staff and managers from UN Geneva and other UN entities participated in 20 Modern Agile training sessions during the year, and more sessions are planned for 2023.

Scan the QR code to watch a short video on UN Geneva’s Modern Agile training.



What is Modern Agile?

Modern Agile is first and foremost a mindset. It is focused on bringing value to people inside and outside a team, on being transparent and learning from experience and on producing better and more satisfying results. It guides teams on how to intentionally introduce tools and practices to nurture an empowered, engaging and inclusive environment, and to become more adaptive and responsive to rapidly changing contexts.

GAME SHIFTER: LEVERAGING IN-HOUSE LOCAL TALENT TO DELIVER ON OUR MANDATES

This year, UN Geneva took a leap forward in recognizing and empowering its General Service staff. In September 2021, UN Geneva had conducted a needs assessment survey to examine how to better support General Service staff. The results, from 1,090 respondents, indicated that career development, rewards and recognition, and good attitudes towards General Service staff were the major factors contributing to job satisfaction and motivation.

In response to the survey, UN Geneva launched the Game Shifter leadership development lab in December 2022, with an inaugural cohort of 18 General Service staff members. Designed specifically for UN Geneva's General Service staff, this innovative programme provides participants with an opportunity to become strong advocates for positive change, regardless of different levels and grades within the Organization.

UN Geneva's move to invest in its General Service staff is a significant step towards enabling the Organization to develop a more agile, effective and accountable workforce. This will also lead to greater job satisfaction among General Service staff, which will help UN Geneva better deliver on its mandates. By recognizing staff potential, UN Geneva is prioritizing inclusivity in the workplace and sending a message that everyone can lead and make a lasting impact.

“Taking part in this programme has really changed my approach to my job and career at the UN. I always used to believe the system was against me and holding me back but now I can see that the future is very firmly in my own hands and that it's up to me to set my own goals and to implement a strategy to achieve them.”

GENERAL SERVICE STAFF MEMBER

What is Game Shifter?

Game Shifter provides the transformational approach to leadership development that today's fast-paced and constantly changing environment is looking for. It offers a unique opportunity for General Service staff to create their own narratives around leadership and rediscover their natural leadership superpowers. Game Shifter demonstrates the necessary mindset shift to help participants break free from traditional notions of leadership and understand how their strengths can be used as catalysts for positive change in the Organization.



The inaugural cohort of the Game Shifter programme

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LEADING WITHOUT AUTHORITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF “SOFT” POWER

Leadership is often associated with authority. Yet many leaders have found success by leading without any official authority, proving that it is more effective to use “soft” means to influence others.

In November, UN Geneva hosted an in-person event with noted scientist John Antonakis, who gave an insightful talk about the important role that soft power plays in motivating people and getting them to commit, without resorting to authority, legal means or coercion. He explored with the participants how charismatic leaders use verbal and nonverbal cues to influence followers and how to demonstrate charisma in a quiet yet impactful way. At the heart of his argument was the idea that followers identify with and commit to leaders who share a vision and values with them.

Participants left the session with renewed appreciation for the “alchemic” power of leadership and its potential to create positive social change. The thought-provoking talk showed how leading without authority requires taking the initiative and investing energy in building relationships, while embracing the unique talents and strengths of each individual. With this approach, leaders can inspire others and foster collective action that can make a lasting difference in their communities.

John Antonakis discusses the importance of soft power in leading without authority, at a workshop held at UN Geneva.



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Participants at the spousal employment support event held at the Palais des Nations



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EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR THE SPOUSES OF UN GENEVA STAFF

Providing career support to spouses and partners is a key factor for the successful integration, high motivation, resilience and engagement of internationally recruited United Nations staff. To better facilitate such support, this year UN Geneva became a corporate member of the Lake Geneva branch of the International Dual Career Network, a non-profit association that promotes dual careers and facilitates the integration of spouses and partners through professional networking and guidance.

On 2 November, UN Geneva – in cooperation with the International Geneva Welcome Centre, the International Dual Career Network and the Michael Page recruitment agency – held an event on spousal employment support for over 300 participants, at the Palais des Nations. The Director of the Division of Administration at the UN Office at Geneva, Clemens Adams, delivered welcome remarks on behalf of the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya. This was followed by presentations from the International Geneva Welcome Centre, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland, the University of Geneva, the

International Dual Career Network, human resources representatives from UN Geneva and the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), and a representative from Michael Page, as well as a personal testimony from a staff member at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The three-hour event, with English and French interpretation, was aimed at helping spouses and partners to better understand requirements and practices within the private sector and international organizations when looking for employment.

Are you a spouse or partner of a UN Geneva employee?
Scan the QR code to fill out a form and receive support through the International Dual Career Network.

