Operational Instruction Ref. OI.ITG.2021.01
Electronic Signatures

Authority:

This Operational Instruction (OI) is promulgated by Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration under OD.ITG.2021.01: IT and Digital Systems Management.

Purpose:

The purpose of this OI is to provide instructions regarding Electronic Signatures for the purpose of effective document management and digitalization in UNOPS.

This OI is promulgated in accordance with the OD.ITG.2021.01: IT and Digital Systems Management. and is based on best practice guidelines in respect to Electronic Signatures of documents. It documents how Electronic Signatures shall be used in UNOPS and provides instructions on its use.

Effective Date:

This OI shall become effective immediately.

Promulgation Date:

06 Jul 2021

[signature redacted]

Marianne de la Touche
Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration

1. Definitions

1.1 "Electronic Signature" shall describe symbols or other data in digital form attached to an electronically transmitted document as verification of the sender's acceptance/ agreement with the contents of the document.

1.2 "Internal Document" shall describe documents that are provided only to parties within UNOPS. Examples include minutes from Contracts and Property Committees for internal use, operational / petty cash advance requests, interview minutes, etc.

1.3 "External Documents" shall refer to documents provided by UNOPS to non-UNOPS parties. Examples include supplier contracts, HR offer letters, donor / partner agreements, etc.

1.4 For the purpose of clarity, a sampling of document types has been provided in Annex 1 with a categorisation of 'Internal' and 'External'.

2. Electronic Signature

2.1 Documents can be electronically signed in three ways:

a) using "Adobe Acrobat Reader";

b) using "Email approval";or

c) using "Google Drive Approval".

2.2 The level of responsibility and delegation for Electronic Signatures shall be equivalent to those governing hand-written signatures.

2.3 As with paper-based processes, validity of the signature is not based on the signature alone but on the context of the exchange of documents. Furthermore, the master copy of the signed document must be retained by the signatory as per the guidelines for document retention. **The master copy of the signed document must be stored on Google Drive,** so it is recorded when and by whom the document has been uploaded.

3. Electronic Signature using Adobe Acrobat Reader

3.1 Adobe Acrobat Reader can be used to sign **Internal Documents** and **External Documents.**

3.2 Several jurisdictions have restrictions on the type of Electronic Signature that is allowed for documents relating to property transfers and lease agreements. Electronic Signatures as described in this document should therefore NOT be used for any property or lease-related matters. Signatures on property or lease-related matters should be printed, signed, and scanned.

3.3 The digital image of the signature is to be created in Adobe Acrobat Reader by drawing it using a finger, stylus or mouse, or by uploading a scanned or photographed version of a handwritten signature in black ink on white paper.

4. Electronic Signature using email

4.1 Only **Internal Documents** can be approved electronically by means of email following the process described in this document.

4.2 All Internal Documents to be approved by email should be sent to the relevant approvers through email as a PDF attachment. Links to documents on Google Drive should not be sent for approval purposes.

4.3 The email approval must be sent directly from the email account of the approver with a clear indication of whether the request has been approved or rejected and by using forwarding so all attached documents are included. Note that using reply/reply all should not be used as it will not include any attachments.

4.4 The received approval email is downloaded as an EML file and retained on Google Drive.

5. Electronic Signature using Drive Approval

5.1 Only **Internal Documents** can be approved electronically by means of the Drive Approvals feature in Google Drive.

5.2 Documents in Google Drive can be sent through a formal approval process using the Google Workspace editors (Docs, Sheets, Slides) or Google Drive.

5.3 The document is approved and signed only when it has been approved by all approvers.

5.4 The Electronic Signature is only valid as long as the document is locked and cannot be edited. If the document is unlocked the approval is rejected, and the document is no longer considered signed.

6. Handwritten Signatures

6.1 Irrespective of the use / availability of Electronic Signatures, handwritten signatures (sometimes referred to as 'pen-on-paper' / 'wet signatures') will continue to be considered as a valid form of signing documents, and scanned copies of documents with handwritten signatures will continue to be accepted as valid.

Annexes

- Annex I - Sample document listing with categorisation
- Annex II - Guidelines for use of electronic signatures
