
Gender Inclusion Practice Note

Designated Lactation Spaces
for Nursing Parents



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations is committed to achieving gender parity, which is a priority for the Secretary-General as per his [System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#). The United Nations is taking concrete steps to make its premises, offices, and meeting spaces inclusive of and accessible to all personnel. For instance, UN Women created the [Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) to support personnel in the field, especially in mission settings, to help increase the representation of women and accelerate efforts to reach parity in the UN system. These Guidelines complement the [Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System](#) (2019) and the [Supplementary Guidance](#) (2019). Supporting professional and personal life integration through family-friendly policies and initiatives that recognize diverse family configurations is an effective way to recruit and retain the best talent for the field. This includes tailored and appropriate facilities for nursing/expressing milk and childcare.

UN Women has identified breastfeeding/bottle-feeding and nursing spaces as key recommendations to bolster gender parity and increase the participation of women in the field, in line with the UN Secretariat's Policy on Breastfeeding ([ST/SGB/2019/1](#)), which states "private and suitably furnished facilities specifically designed for breastfeeding or expressing milk shall be made available". The lactation space

should be for the sole function of lactation designed to be accessible for persons with disabilities and with appropriate provisions, such as a fridge and a sink.

The practice note builds on UN Women's Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines and featured good practice examples therein. The UN Gender Focal Points who have been the key agents of change in establishing these good practices have indicated that providing lactations spaces for parents has shown to provide numerous benefits. They include improvements in cost-effectiveness, inclusive work culture, productivity, better work ethic, and diversity.

The Business Operations Strategy 2.0 (BOS) provides a channel for UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to advance the inclusion of and access of women personnel and put the measures in place to provide decent and productive work opportunities.

This Practice Note focuses specifically on attracting, engaging, and recruiting women personnel into the UN's 131 Country Teams through the BOS as a first step. The timeline to incorporate these services is from January 2022 to December 2023. This guidance note seeks to provide a step-by-step description of how designated lactation spaces can be adopted by the UNCTs.

INTRODUCTION

The [Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) provide recommendations and good practice examples to achieve parity in the field and they contain six thematic areas:

- **Professional and personal life integration;**
- **Standards of conduct;**
- **Security and safety;**
- **Occupational safety, health, and wellbeing;**
- **Recruitment, talent management, and retention;**
- **Leadership, accountability, and implementation.**

Each chapter begins with an introduction to one of the six thematic areas, reflecting the challenges and opportunities identified by interviewees. The chapters also provide a series of recommendations and good examples for the organization, managers and personnel at the individual level. The recommendations are made based on the comprehensive and varied methods of data collection including qualitative interviews, focus groups and meetings. Each action contributes towards building an enabling working environment in support of gender parity and a more effective and inclusive modern organization that better serves the peoples of the world.

The United Nations aims to support all its personnel, including those who are working parents. To do so, the organization supports new parents in fulfilling additional duties and care responsibilities, ensuring the wellbeing of not only UN personnel but their infants. In this regard, breastfeeding/bottle-feeding has been found to be a key factor of healthy early childhood development. As per the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF recommendations, nurturing infants exclusively by breastfeeding/bottle-feeding ensures secure bonding and attachment between a mother and their newborn, an important foundation for a healthy life. Furthermore, breast milk serves as a first vaccine for newborns, enhancing cognitive development and reducing childhood and maternal illness, lowering health care costs and strengthening societies.

UN Women is grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women; and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security. Placing women's rights at the center of all its efforts, UN Women leads and coordinate United Nations system efforts to ensure that commitments on gender parity translate into action throughout the world.

OBJECTIVES OF PROVIDING LACTATION SPACES FOR PARENTS

Resident Coordinators are crucial actors of the SG's efforts to reform business operations, also called the 'efficiency agenda'. It is a strategic framework for operational collaboration at the country level and plays a crucial role in integrating and scaling common services and practices across agencies to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This guidance note was developed to drive implementation of the recommendations of the Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines and promote gender inclusion in UN operations through the BOS in the area of Designated lactation spaces for nursing parents or parents of young children.

This guidance note on designated lactation spaces for parents and children aims to facilitate the implementation of the pertaining recommendations identified in the Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines, which identified breastfeeding/bottle-feeding and nursing spaces as key recommendations to bolster gender parity and increase the participation of women in the field.

Specific objectives are as follows:

1. Ensure the wellbeing of UN personnel who are nursing as well as the healthy early childhood development of their children.
2. Bolster the participation of women in the field by tackling obstacles women face when serving in field locations.

3. Provide safe spaces for lactation and caregiving to support the careers of women and young parents.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

UNCTs are recommended to implement these recommendations in close collaboration with its female personnel, particularly parents, to contextualize the needs of these main stakeholders. Consultations with the UN Gender Focal Points and Focal Points for Women, Gender Advisors and local experts are also recommended in order to have a thorough overview of the needs of women and infants regarding country-specific contexts. Based on the good practice examples below, staff unions, the Operational Management Team, Gender Theme Groups, Facility Management and Human Resources were identified as further key stakeholders as along with the importance of leadership support.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. Kick-off

- a. Familiarize yourself with the Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines, in particular Chapter one on Professional and Personal life integration (pages 18-28) and UN Secretariat's Policy on Breastfeeding (ST/SGB/2019/1). Reach out to the Office of the Focal Point for Women at UN Women¹ or to your Gender Focal Point.
- a. If available, become familiar with relevant national legislation on breastfeeding/bottle-feeding or early childcare. How many hours of breastfeeding/bottle-feeding are allotted to new mothers and in what time-frames?

- a. Begin to identify and engage with women personnel and local subject matter experts.

2. Stock-take

- a. Map the current initiatives on the matter in the UNCT. Are there currently nursing spaces? Where do women breastfeed, Is there a designated space in the office?
- b. Analyze the feasibility of the endeavor. Is there a physical space in the current UNCT building and offices to implement this recommendation? Can an existing room be easily adapted or is there a need to build an extension in the facility?
- c. Survey women and parents of young children to identify specific needs.

3. Opportunity Analysis

- a. Identify potential partnerships with local corporate social responsibility initiatives that could provide assistance in the development of the lactation spaces.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis

- a. Conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the benefits obtained such as increasing women's sense of belonging to the organization and the reduction of maternity-related absenteeism.

5. Planning Framework

- a. Prioritize the activities to begin the construction of the lactation space or adapting the current office layout to the lactation space requirements.
- b. Liaise with security and safety services to facilitate smooth access for partners or child-minders bringing a child to be fed during workdays while maintaining appropriate security standards.
- c. Identify how the space will be managed as well as possible maintenance costs.
- d. Determine how much funding is required in your country's context and the level of UNCTs engagement and costs needed.

¹ For further information, please contact: focalpoint.forwomen@unwomen.org

- e. Identify existing and potential funding opportunities to leverage for the implementation of the proposed plan.

6. Final Steps

- a. Define a roadmap and detailed timeline for implementation.
- b. Identify necessary resources (financial, material and human) to undertake implementation.
- c. Finalize the budget for each activity.
- d. Develop a risk mitigation strategy.

COST FACTORS

Costs may vary between duty stations, however, the following should be taken into account: The lactation room is an exclusively designated space that is properly equipped for parents' breastfeeding/bottle-feeding needs. The space should be adequately sized and ensure the privacy of mothers and should be accessible for all employees. The room should be equipped with a comfortable chair, access to power outlets, a storage system, waste bin, paper towels, washbasins, and soap dispensers, hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes or disinfecting spray. Additionally, it is recommended to provide lactation

counselling support and assign a focal point or coordinator to help with access, planning and oversight of the lactation room.

Enabling Factors:

- Breastfeeding improves the health of the mother and the child, protecting the child from diseases and strengthening the bond between both.
- Breast milk is a sustainable resource as it does not generate waste or pollution.
- Female personnel are able to more easily combine work with motherhood, as breastfeeding in the workplace facilitates logistics and transportation.

Potential Constraints:

- Lactation in the workplace might be of a sensitive nature in certain cultural contexts, leading to women to avoid it due to social stigma and/or a lack of support system in the workplace.
- Lack of adequate space for adapting to a lactation space within existing office configurations.
- Lack of acceptance of the designated space due to a small number of personnel with young children and the lack of office space in general which would discourage bringing your child to work.
- Lack of funding for the implementation of this initiative might affect the UNCT.

Picture 1 Lactation Space, UNMIK, Javiera Santa Cruz





Picture 2: Lactation Space, UNMIK, Javiera Santa Cruz

SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICABILITY

Implementing a designated lactation space will be a one-time investment and could remain in place for many years, with relatively low maintenance efforts. This initiative will have the potential to share knowledge and influence other local partners, including governmental, multilateral, and private sector organizations to create an enabling environment for parents to attract and retain the best talent, especially in the field. Further, this initiative will also enable UNCTs to share experiences that can foster replicability.

Picture 3: Lactation Space and creche, UN House Abuja, SaAdiya Haliru



Good Practice examples:

The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) provides a lactation room with:

- a fridge;
- changing table and chair;
- diapers, hand sanitizer;
- toys or books;
- practical information, including the Enabling Environment Guidelines.

This room has Wi-Fi in case personnel need to take care of a child during a working day. It is accessible at all times to the Gender Advisor and Gender Focal Point, as well as nursing colleagues. Access is granted through a badge set up with security. The room is maintained by the regular cleaning staff and is stocked with staff donations. The space was promoted to colleagues by the SRSG in a townhall meeting and on International Women's Day.

The UN House in Abuja, Nigeria, provides a physical room where parents can bring their child with a caregiver. The space is on the first floor to ensure accessibility, and is open daily from 8am to 5pm for all UN personnel. Key stakeholders to initiate the creation of such space were the Operational Management Team, the Gender Theme Group, Facility Management and Human Resources.

From **UNICEF's Breastfeeding Room Guideline**: In 2017 the **Kenyan Parliament** passed a Health Act which required all employers to establish breastfeeding stations with necessary equipment and facilities; to take strict measures to prevent any direct or indirect promotion, marketing or selling of infant formula

and/or breast milk substitutes in breastfeeding stations; and to grant all breastfeeding employees paid breaks, in addition to regular time-off for meals, breastfeeding, or breast milk expression, for up to one hour of every eight-hour work period. UNICEF played a key role in advocating for this Act, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Kenyan Private Sector Alliance.

CONCLUSION

Promoting a better professional and personal life integration through ensured access to a safe and user-friendly lactation room is indispensable for the UN to attract and retain women. The Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines speaks pertinently to the importance of changing the organizational culture through investing in creating enabling environments in the workplace. Specifically, in line with the UN Secretariat's Policy on Breastfeeding, the United Nations is recommended to facilitate safe and private lactation spaces for parents, designated for breastfeeding or expressing milk. In this regard,

this gender inclusion guidance note helps UNCTs to bolster professional and personal life integration and facilitate the recruitment and retention of female personnel in field locations, which are in line with the organizational goal to reach gender parity.

For further information, please contact:
focalpoint.forwomen@unwomen.org

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Being a Working Parent at UNDP: a Reference Guide (UNDP)

Breastfeeding is key to the comprehensive development of children, their mothers and society (UNICEF)

Practical guide: Breastfeeding in the workplace for medium and large enterprises and institutions (UNICEF Mexico)

Advocacy Brief: Breastfeeding and Family-Friendly Policies. (Global Breastfeeding Collective, UNICEF, WHO)



Picture 4: Example of a lactation room, Breastfeeding support in the workplace Guidance, UNICEF