

Top Tips to Foster Inclusivity Online During COVID-19

The [Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations](#), created by UN Women in cooperation with the Human Resources Network of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) in 2019, provide useful guidance and recommendations to transform organizational culture so that it fosters a safe and respectful environment in which everyone has equal access to opportunities. An enabling environment is key to achieve and sustain gender parity at the UN.

As the majority of the work is currently carried out remotely, discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, can also occur online and affect colleagues,¹ particularly women's ability to participate in online spaces. The whole UN community has a responsibility to create and support a culture of respect online. Adapted from the Enabling Environment Guidelines, here are five ways in which UN personnel can foster inclusivity and respect during COVID-19 and beyond:

1. Create and support a culture of respect, accountability and zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority

Be mindful of the UN's values and reject racism, sexism, xenophobia, and all forms of hateful or intolerant speech, both in person and online. Stand up against discrimination and harassment and discourage others from engaging in such behavior, for example, in meetings.

Standing up against harassment online is the responsibility of everyone. Take collective ownership and be an effective bystander. Establish what collective ownership looks like in the specific context and support its practice, for instance, if someone engages in unacceptable behavior online. Some reactions include publicly or privately calling out negative behavior, checking in on the affected individual, redirecting the conversation, or asking someone else to intervene. Inform yourself about your

organization's policies and guidance on the prevention of and response to discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority.

2. Actively support and build an accessible, diverse, inclusive and safe workplace for all

Inclusion and accessibility can be fostered through sharing information across departments, as well as through communication and technological accessibility.

Foster a sense of belonging through regular check-ins and virtual team meetings to drive performance of your team and colleagues. When someone proposes a good idea, amplify it by repeating it and giving them credit.

Create a feeling of community and get to know colleagues, supervisors or interns through virtual coffee or tea hours, to the extent possible.

¹ For more guidance, see: UN Women (2020). Online and ICT-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls During COVID-19. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19#view>; UN Women (2019). What Will It Take? Promoting Cultural Change to End Sexual Harassment. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/09/discussion-paper-what-will-it-take-promoting-cultural-change-to-end-sexual-harassment>; UN Women (2020). 'How to address online sexual harassment during COVID-19' product at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/02/supplementary-guidance-on-the-enabling-environment-guidelines-for-the-united-nations-system>

Invite members of underrepresented groups within your office to speak at staff meetings, write for email broadcasts and newsletters, or take on other highly visible roles.

3. Foster a culture that is supportive of work-life balance and flexibility

Contribute to a culture of trust when using flexible arrangements and by demonstrating regular support online to your colleagues. It is important to continuously assess and adapt to the situation regarding messages, channels, and frequency.

Communicate with predictability (frequency, channels, timing), allow for flexible hours and work organization, provide extra time for breaks for employees, and establish trust across all measures. Remote teams need to create new patterns that establish clarity in communication to bring predictability and certainty to virtual conversations.

Remember to practice self-care. Recognize your own level of stress, manage yourself before managing others, and make time for your physical and emotional needs.

4. Enhance the accessibility, inclusivity and safety of meetings and events to ensure they are welcoming to diverse participants

Ensure each meeting has an agenda that has been communicated prior to the meeting. This makes it easier for individuals who are introvert and not as comfortable speaking up. This also helps each team member prepare ahead of time so they can contribute to the conversation.

Ensure employees know how to reach the team's technical support staff should they require assistance and consider appointing a tech-savvy team member who could provide extra help.

Discuss which platform you will use to communicate as a team. Clarify expectations for online availability and confirm everyone has access to the technological tools and support.

Address unequal access to technology, hardware, and software. Ask colleagues about their level of access to technology and point them to your IT department should they require assistance.

Make use of chat functions in online meetings. This is a simple way to ask questions and keep engagement lively. Moreover, feel free to forward questions about specific topics to personnel with subject-matter expertise.

5. Foster an environment that promotes diverse discussions to maximize collaboration and productivity

Take action if you notice that colleagues are excluded from meetings or email exchanges that are pertinent to their work. For example, forward meeting invites or add them to email conversations ("I am looping in ... in this conversation as it relevant to their area of work").

If you are asked to present or serve on a panel and know someone from an underrepresented group who would be an equally good or better fit, recommend that person after asking first whether this is acceptable for her/him.

Ensure diversity in online panels and meetings and engage professionally and collaboratively.