GLOBAL
HEALTH 5050
TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN GLOBAL HEALTH

HOW TO:

DEVELOP FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES

This how-to guide seeks to support organisations in developing best-practice parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplace policies. It presents definitions and essential components of such policies, outlines actions staff can take to encourage development and uptake of policies, and recommends resources for further information.

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It is imperative that the leading global organisations active in health do more. More for the right to fair and equitable workplaces, more for gender equality and more to support our staff who juggle caring responsibilities in the home and community. Together we can change this.

SANIA NISHTAR
SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF PAKISTAN
ON SOCIAL PROTECTION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Why parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplace policies matter

Enabling policy environments within workplaces can support individuals to meet their career goals while also fulfilling their roles and responsibilities outside the workplace. Policies that promote flexible and family-friendly workplaces can bring substantial benefits to employees, organisations, families and the wider community.

Paid maternity, paternity and parental leave policies, coupled with flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies, empower women and men in the workplace and support their economic security. These policies may further benefit children and facilitate parents' return to work after childbearing.[1]

Still, specific measures that facilitate flexible and family-friendly workplaces remain the exception and vary considerably in entitlements—often reflecting statutory obligations and not necessarily best practice. GH5050 recommends that organisations go beyond statutory legal minimums and actively promote a healthy work-life balance. Unhealthy working environments and lack of flexibility is widespread in the global health and development sector, despite it being entrusted with respecting, protecting and fulfilling the fundamental principles of human rights.

For example, parental leave entitlements vary in remuneration and duration, with the tendency to privilege maternity leave, which may reinforce stereotypical gender norms. Further, policies of organisations working in and influencing the field of global health are complex, difficult to navigate and often inaccessible. As a result employees may fail to reap the full benefits of family-friendly workplace policies.

Equitable paid parental leave policies are critical to fostering gender transformative norms of family responsibility, compensating people for their unpaid labour, closing the gender pay gap, and promoting women's leadership. The duration of leave, wage replacement rate, whether leave, including paid and shared leave, is made available to both parents, and whether support is available to new parents returning to work, shape opportunities and barriers for career progression.

Flexible working and family-friendly policies are key to promoting inclusive and healthy working environments that are considerate of employees' needs. People's caring responsibilities (e.g. parenthood or attending to family members with ongoing healthcare needs) are a key determinant of equality of career opportunities for women and men. Research shows that, with sufficient support from leadership and supervisors, flexible working arrangements, such as condensed working hours or teleworking, and family-friendly workplace policies can be powerful tools to enhance staff inclusion and retention.[2]

[1] ILO. Maternity and paternity at work. 2014.
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

[2] OECD. Background brief on how workplace flexibility can help European employees to balance work and family. 2016.
https://www.oecd.org/els/family/Be-Flexible-Backgrounder-Workplace-Flexibility.pdf

Definitions

Family-friendly workplace

A family-friendly workplace or employer makes it possible for employees to fulfill both their family and work obligations. Family-friendly workplace policies encompass a wide range of policies to promote a healthy work-life balance, including: paid and adequate parental leave, return to work support, guarantees of non-discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or family obligations, family leave, access to affordable childcare support and flexible working hours and arrangements.

Flexible working

A way of working that suits an employee's needs. Different modes of flexible working exist, including: job-sharing, working from home and telecommuting, part-time working, compressed hours, flexitime, annualised hours, staggered hours and phased retirement. In some countries there is a legal right to request flexible working arrangements and organisations are required to provide a "sound" reason for any denial of flexible working requests.

Maternity leave

Leave generally available to mothers, designed to protect the health of the new mother and child, taken before, during and immediately after childbirth/adoption.

Paternity leave

Leave generally available to fathers, usually taken shortly after the birth/adoption of the child.

Parental leave

Leave available equally to mothers and fathers, as: (i) a non-transferable individual right (i.e. both parents have an entitlement to an equal amount of leave); (ii) an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent; or (iii) a family right that parents can divide between themselves as they choose (shared parental leave). Available to both partners in some settings, irrespective of their gender identity and/or whether they are in a same-sex or hetero-sexual relationship.

Support to returning parents

Alongside entitlements of returning to a previous post after a period of leave (maternity/paternity/parental), some organisations offer support to parents returning to work, for example adequate lactation facilities and a supportive breastfeeding environment in the workplace, on-site childcare and/or financial support for childcare and flexible working arrangements. Some organisations offer additional programmes such as career coaching, expert advice and dedicated personnel to facilitate back-to-work transitions and longer-term retention of staff.

Key components of parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplace policies

Drawing upon policy guidance, best practices from various settings and GH5050 resources, this guide identifies key components for organisations to consider including during development and revision of policies. The extent to which policies deliver potential benefits, including for career opportunities and progression, depends on the entitlements they provide.

Key components of maternity, paternity and parental leave policies

Leave entitlements

- Ensure leave policies are inclusive of parents and caregivers irrespective of the means of becoming a parent (i.e. childbirth, adoption, surrogacy), and inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities among parents.

- Establish paid maternity leave policies with entitlements which at least meet the minimum ILO standard of 14 weeks of paid leave, irrespective of national norms and standards.

- Provide paid paternity leave, available to fathers or same-sex partners, and encourage full uptake of this leave.

- Provide well-paid parental leave with non-transferable portions for both caregivers and monitor the gender balance of leave usage.

- Provide paid leave for parents to attend antenatal, adoption or surrogacy appointments as necessary.

- Put in place programmes to ensure employees are aware of entitlements, and instill confidence that employees will not be penalised for taking leave, while promoting a healthy culture around taking leave.

- Ensure non-discrimination in the workplace against people who have taken parental or carers' leave. While leave entitlements are increasingly common around the world,[3] pregnancy- and maternity-related discrimination and disadvantage persist.[4]

Return to work

- Offer support during the leave period to maintain contact, facilitate returning to work and ensure employees do not face discrimination or disadvantage for future career advancement.

- Integrate return-to-work support in leave policies and ensure that staff are aware of these policies before taking leave.

- Promote policies and working environments that promote breastfeeding, including by ensuring adequate time, space and flexibility for breastfeeding mothers.

[3] ILO. Maternity and paternity at work. 2014. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

[4] Equality and Human Rights Commission. Applying behavioural insights to reduce pregnancy- and maternity-related discrimination and disadvantage. 2017. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/applying-behavioural-insights-reduce-pregnancy-and-maternity-related

Key components of flexible working

- Ensure all staff are aware of and can request flexible working opportunities, including but not limited to job-sharing; working from home and telecommuting; part-time working; compressed hours; flexitime; annualised hours; staggered hours; and phased retirement.

Key components of family-friendly workplace policies

- Offer flexible working opportunities to all staff with caring responsibilities (e.g. child-care, elder-care, care of adults with disabilities).
- Provide paid family leave which enables employees to take time away from work to care for sick children or family members with serious health conditions.

Progressing towards more inclusive working environments is crucial to achieving gender equality at work and in society. While national approaches to entitlements to parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplaces vary considerably, GH5050 encourages global health organisations to rise to the top, irrespective of national policy. Beyond setting enabling policies, organisations must ensure that policies and entitlements are fully utilised and that all employees are supported in achieving their personal, professional and family-oriented goals.

What you can do

… if you are a senior manager or human resources officer

- Examine your organisation's current policies on parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplaces in relation to the key components set out in this guide.
- Engage with employees on the issue, raise awareness of current policies and discuss how the working environment can be improved.
- Modify or develop your organisations policies and practices through rigorous, evidence-informed and consultative processes.
- Model good practice and encourage leave take-up by taking appropriate family leave and flexible work yourself.

… if you are an employee

- Get to know your organisation's policies and practices on parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplaces. If your organisation's policies and practices are not readily available, talk to your manager about accessing that information.
- Engage with other employees on the issue and discuss how the working environment can be improved.
- Engage with unions, other staff or senior managers around your organisation's policies and working environment. If you or other experience discrimination or disadvantage, contact HR and/or unions.

The GH5050 2019 Report reviewed the family-friendly workplace policies of 200 organisations active in global health.

Examples of notable policies to support new parents and enhance retention among those 200 organisations include:

AbbVie recently revised its U.S. Parental Leave policy which provides additional paid and unpaid time off, along with more flexibility to use the leave intermittently in single-day increments to create a reduced work schedule (versus requiring continuous leave).

GIZ upholds family-friendly human resources policies, for example by offering flexible working hours, opportunities for part-time work, and where possible inhouse kindergartens and parent-child offices.

Medtronic offers Careers 2.0 as part of efforts to provide opportunities for women in engineering returning to the industry after leave.

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Organisations must ensure that all employees are supported in achieving their personal, professional and family-oriented goals.

Recommended resources

GH5050 recommends the following resources for further information and guidance to support organisations in developing best-practice parental leave, flexible working and family-friendly workplace policies. These resources can also be found on the GH5050 site [globalhealth5050.org/resources].

Parental leave

- This ILO underline publication underline reviews national laws and practices on maternity and paternity leave and benefits in 185 countries and territories.

- Applying behavioural insights to reduce pregnancy- and maternity-related discrimination (Equality and Human Rights Commission) examines how evidence from behavioural science can change the behaviours of both employers and women to reduce epregnancy- and maternity-related discrimination and disadvantage.

- The International Network on Leave Policies and Research produces an annual review of leave policies and related research. The most recent presents the state of maternity, paternity and parental leave; leave to care for sick children and other employment-related measures to support working parents; and early childhood education and care policies in 40+ countries.

Flexible working

- Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) provides free and impartial information and advice to UK-based employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. Among other things, their website reviews workers' right to request flexible working in the UK as well as a sample flexible working policy.

- This guidance from Acas, Flexible working and work-life balance, outlines important considerations when employers of all sizes are considering or reconsidering flexible working practices, and a variety of flexible working arrangements.

Family-friendly policies:

- What works to reduce your gender pay gap: Family friendly policies action note, (UK Government Equalities Office) recommends a number of actions to employers to reduce their gender pay gap.

- Flexible Working Policies: A Comparative Review (Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK) compares flexible working policies of several countries.

- This Guide to family friendly work explains workers rights and how to make working life more family-friendly (Trades Union Congress, UK).

In putting policies into practice, these UN Women Enabling Environment Guidelines aim to support efforts to create a working environment that embraces equality, eradicates bias and is inclusive of all staff.

About the series

GH5050 How-To Guides consolidate global best practice and evidence to support organisations in developing and improving gender-related policies and practices. GH5050 encourages organisations to use these guides as a starting point. Recognising that every organisation – their staff, sector, context and experience – is unique, organisations should develop their policies through rigorous, evidence-informed and consultative processes to ensure that they are effective and tailor-made, while increasing ownership and commitment among all staff, management and board members.

In the series:

- Measuring and Addressing the Gender Pay Gap in Global Health

- Guide to Parental Leave, Flexible Working and Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

- How to Develop a Comprehensive Sexual Harassment Policy

- Reviewing Gender-Related Policies and Practices: Global Health 50/50 2019 Report Methodology

Located here: globalhealth5050.org/GH5050-How-To-Series

GH5050 2019 Report and organisational performance

Global Health 50/50 is an independent initiative to advance action and accountability for gender equality in global health and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its 2019 Report, Equality Works, reviewed the gender-related policies and practices of 198 global organisations active in health, with a special focus on gender equality in the workplace.

To review your organisation's results, visit globalhealth5050.org/data-2019/. If your organisation was not included in the report, we encourage you to take the GH5050 Organisational Self-Assessment.

For more information contact: info@globalhealth5050.org.

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