

Brochure 2 of 4

Understanding Family-Friendly Policies

Building Family-Friendly Workplaces: A Toolkit for Business



BACKGROUND

Family-friendly policies support UNICEF's Care and Support Agenda, which recognizes that strengthening care systems is essential for children's development and functioning societies and economies. Care responsibilities are often unevenly distributed, with women carrying the largest burden, limiting their participation in the workforce.

Businesses play a key role in strengthening care systems. By supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities, businesses help reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing, and contribute to healthier families and communities. At the same time, these investments lead to stronger organizational performance.

WHAT ARE FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES?

Family-friendly policies are workplace measures and arrangements that enable employees to balance their work and family responsibilities. UNICEF takes a child rights lens, recognizing that when employees are supported as caregivers, businesses benefit from a more stable, productive, and engaged workforce which in turn creates a nurturing environment for children's development.

Family-friendly policies can include:

- A mix of paid parental leave (e.g., maternity, paternity, parental, child caring, emergency leave)
- Flexible working arrangements
- Breastfeeding support
- Affordable and quality childcare
- Protection of basic labour rights

Family-friendly policies are inclusive of all types of families and caregiving arrangements, including single parents, adoptive and foster families, LGBTIQ+ parents, kinship carers, and others.

POLICIES AS A PACKAGE

Family-friendly policies in the workplace are most effective when they are implemented as a comprehensive package rather than standalone actions.

When combined, these policies create an enabling environment for employees, allowing businesses to respond to the diverse and evolving needs of their workforce. For example:

1

Parental leave without childcare support limits ability to return to work

2

Flexible work without supportive workplace culture may not be used

3

Childcare without affordability excludes lower-income workers

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES ACROSS SECTORS

There is no 'one-size-fits all' approach to family-friendly policies. Family-friendly policies may vary across countries, geographies, and sectors and should be based on local context and workplace-specific needs, barriers, and priorities.



At **farms**, appropriate policies can include:

- Flexible schedules during planting and harvesting seasons
- On-site or mobile childcare facilities and healthcare access points
- Equal pay and professional development pathways for women



At **offices**, appropriate policies can include:

- Remote or hybrid work options and access to digital infrastructure
- Gradual return-to-work programmes
- Affordable childcare facilities
- Employee wellbeing and parenting support programmes



At **factories**, appropriate policies can include:

- On-site or nearby childcare facilities that align with shift schedules
- Provision of transport to childcare
- Designated lactation spaces with paid adequate breaks
- Flexibility in shift schedules where remote work is not possible



At **service-oriented workplaces**, appropriate policies can include:

- Flexible work arrangements, such as shift swapping and part-time options
- Childcare support covering irregular hours
- Healthcare and mental health services



WHO SHOULD POLICIES TARGET?

Family-friendly policies should be designed to support all employees with caregiving responsibilities, recognizing that care needs extend beyond traditional gender norms and definitions of family. Inclusive policies ensure equitable access and help reduce disparities in the workplace.

Policies should also consider migrant workers and those in informal, part-time, low-income, or non-standard roles or locations, who are often excluded from such benefits.

When developing inclusive family-friendly policies, consider workers in different types of caregiving roles, including:

- Parents, including mothers, fathers, adoptive parents, and guardians
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Employees caring for spouses, siblings, or parents

MATURITY SPECTRUM

Implementing family-friendly policies is a journey. Businesses can adopt these policies gradually by assessing their current performance and identifying initial steps to advance:

- At a **foundational level**, businesses are at the initial stages of implementing. Basic policies may meet legal requirements but can be improved.
- At an **intermediate level**, businesses have established basic policies that are aligned with goals and are tracked. Policies may extend beyond legal requirements and be promoted within the organization by leadership.
- At an **advanced level**, businesses are leaders implementing comprehensive and integrated family-friendly policies. Policies should be refined based on employee feedback. Opportunities may still exist to improve quality and external communications.

As there is no one-size-fits-all approach each business's journey will differ. The UNICEF Toolkit supports businesses in identifying the family-friendly policies best suited to their specific context, with the aim of continuous improvement. Each step forward contributes to better outcomes for both employees and businesses.

TAKE ACTION TODAY

Learn more and identify practical first steps with the UNICEF Building Family-Friendly Workplaces Toolkit at:

<https://www.unicef.org/childrightsandbusiness/workstreams/global-supply-chains/family-friendly-workplaces>.