

Work/Family Agenda: IOM's commitment to create and maintain
a family supportive work environment

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Introduction

The reconciliation of work and family responsibilities has been an issue of debate among United Nations Member States. In the words of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) "The importance of facilitating reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for both genders has become a matter of growing interest, both in the public and private sectors, if employers are to attract and retain the highest quality workforce. Only good conditions of work for all employees, which enable women and men to reconcile their occupational and family obligations, will ensure implementation of the principle of equality of treatment. Moreover, studies have shown that, as long as such policies and measures as those governing maternity/family leave, part-time work, flexible working hours, etc., primarily target women, women will be caught in the traditionalist role of assuming the larger share of family responsibilities."¹

1. Progress has been made during the various sessions of CCAQ in this area. In its 78th session (1993), the Commission endorsed the proposals in respect of the provision of counselling services for staff members and their families who were sent on emergency missions or other field assignments, as well as the review of special leave entitlements for family-related matters. In its 82nd session (1995), CCAQ engaged for the first time in a global discussion on work family issues and critical decisions were made at this point. Firstly, the decision was that organizations should consider the introduction of measures which would lead to a climate conducive to equal participation of men and women in the work of the organization, such as flexible working hours, part-time work, job-sharing schemes, child care and special arrangements. It also recognized that if organizations were to be competitive and upgrade their quality of performance, senior management and Member States had to be made aware of the cost/benefit of policies and programmes designed to allow employees to meet their family responsibilities and those of their work, particularly for expatriate staff. Also, the issue of spouse employment came as a priority area for action and the lack of provisions in this area was considered an impediment to the recruitment and retention of quality staff.

¹ Indexed Summary of the Discussions and Agreements Reached in the Administrative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) Eighth edition (1997).

2. Most recently, at its 83rd session (1995), CCAQ adopted for ACC's endorsement (ACC adopted the policy) a work/family agenda policy putting forward the organizations' commitment to create and maintain a family supportive work environment. On the basis of this general framework, each organization would consider the best means for developing more specific organizational policies and guidelines.
3. Based on the principle that the most competitive conditions of work are linked to the highest efficiency and performance of its staff, the present document aims to bring to the attention of IOM's senior management the importance of addressing in a comprehensive manner the issues related to the work/family agenda. It is recommended to put forward a policy where the Organization conveys through action its commitment to create and maintain a family-supportive environment.
4. Keeping in line with the general framework adopted by the executive heads of all organizations of the United Nations common system, "to promote a supportive work environment which will promote productivity and enable staff members to respond to the conflicting pressures of work and family life", it is recommended that such policy be drawn up covering the following areas:
 - contractual status and family responsibilities;
 - maternity and paternity issues;
 - child-care; family-related absences;
 - spouse employment;
 - flexible work arrangements and;
 - cultural change in favor of family-supportive environment.

Therefore, the following points aim at providing the basis for the Organization's Work/Family Agenda policy by presenting to senior management a series of recommendations for their consideration and ultimate decision.

5. Contractual status and family responsibilities

To create equality of opportunities and treatment for staff with family responsibilities, the Organization will take measures to narrow the gap between regular/fixed-term contracts status and special fixed-term/short-term contract status (less than 1 year) as this relates to family benefits. It is recommended that staff who have completed 12 consecutive months of work with the Organization be given a Fixed-term contract or a Special fixed-term contract that enables them to receive the established family-related benefits.

The following chart describes the types of contracts existing in IOM and the current family-related benefits that these entail:

TYPE OF CONTRACT	FAMILY-RELATED BENEFITS				
	MATERNITY	EDUCATION GRANT ²	FAMILY ALLOWANCE	HOME-LEAVE & FAMILY VISIT ³	OTHER FAMILY-RELATED
Regular (Indefinite)	16 weeks	Dependent children from age 5 ⁴ through 25 Education grant travel	Professionals and HQ Employees (higher allowance for disabled children)	Hardship duty-stations: every year	1-3 days compassionate leave depending on distance travel
Regular Fixed-term (One year)			Secondary dependent recognized only if spouse is not already dependent	Non-hardship duty stations: Every 2 years	
Special Fixed-term (Less than one year)			None	None	
Short-term (Less than one year on special contract)	None	None	None	Not automatic	1-3 days (same as above) compassionate leave, depending on distance travel.

7. Maternity and paternity issues

Currently, only women under regular, fixed-term, and special fixed-term contracts are entitled to receive paid maternity leave of 16 weeks duration. It is recommended that:

- All women, regardless of their contract arrangements, may be eligible for maternity benefits after 12 months of continuous work with the organization.
- In addition to the 16 weeks of paid maternity leave granted under the current staff rules, paid maternity leave will be extended for 4 additional weeks. who breastfeed may work at 75% from the time their maternity leave has expired until the time her infant reaches 12 months of age. This would facilitate the breastfeeding of their infants, exclusively or partially, up to the age of 12 months. The women will

² Education grant generally applies for international staff only, with the exception of parents of disabled children, in which case, both employees and officials receive a special education grant.

³ Home-leave and Family Visit entitlement applies for international staff only.

⁴ Education grant can also be applied **for children below age 5**, if it can be proven that they undergo a structured programme where grammar and math are included.

continue to be paid at 100%; in addition, any necessary coverage of her 25%-absence will be subsidized by the Organization.

- A clear policy will be in place to provide job security for women on maternity leave or for any staff on parental leave for an extended period of time so that a position is ensured upon return.
- To facilitate the involvement of men in child-care, a male staff member may, after the birth or adoption of his child, be granted *Paid Paternity Leave* for the first two weeks following his child's birth/arrival at home and *Leave With Partial Pay* for the following two weeks.
- The Organization will facilitate part-time work or leave of absence, for parents who request it, for a period of up to 3 years after their child's birth.

8. Child-care

The availability and provision of good quality child-care is essential to the achievement of equal opportunities for men and women. When the parental demands of child-care are not adequately supported, women and lone parents with dependent children in particular are denied opportunities to participate in the work force. The Organization will do all possible to provide and to advocate for the child-care needs of its staff. To this end, IOM will:

- Make host country authorities aware of the importance to the Organization that the needs of child-care for its expatriate staff be met, and request that these make available child-care spaces for IOM staff;
- Support the establishment of an interagency child-care facility, in collaboration with UN system agencies, funds and programmes present in each duty station, in order that parents might have a wider range of choices available to them;
- Subsidize staff child-care expenses in either state managed facilities or appropriate private arrangements.

9. Senior Dependent Care

An appropriate work/family agenda will also recognize staff member's obligations to adult dependents and immediate family.

Staff will be allowed to take paid leave in the event of serious illness of parent away from the duty station (actual direct travel time, when travelling on work days). Details of family leave arrangements will be

determined on an exceptional/case-by-case basis.

- In the case of serious illness and/or care of adult family members, longer periods may be needed. Unpaid special leave, which may be granted to care for ailing parents, is an important element in creating a family-supportive environment. Re-entry of the position formerly held or to an equivalent position should form part of such arrangements.

10. Family-related absence

IOM will support the following leave provisions in relation to family-related events:

- Within the current provisions of “uncertified” sick leave, currently a maximum of 7 days/year, a staff member may charge absences resulting from family-related emergencies, such as care of sick child at home. A staff member appointed for a period of less than one year may similarly charge absences resulting from sudden family related emergencies within the limits of and proportionate to the amount of uncertified sick leave of the appointment.

Five days of compassionate leave may be granted to staff in the event of death of significant relatives, (3 days plus a maximum of 2 travel days)..

11. Spouse employment

Recognizing that the lack of proper employment of spouses is a major obstacle for recruitment and retention of qualified staff, and in particular for professional women, the Organization will give top priority to the issue and will seek the facilitation of work permits of spouses and address any obstacles to the employment and integration of spouses in the host country.

12. Flexible work arrangements

With the aim of reducing the pressures on the staff resulting from heavy work schedules and taking into account the needs of the organization, IOM will establish guidelines for flexible work arrangements, such as but not limited to telecommuting or home-based work.

13. Cultural change in favor of family-supportive environment

The Organization will convey to the staff its commitment to create and maintain “a supportive work environment which will promote productivity

and enable staff members to respond to the conflicting pressures of work and family life”, and will initiate an information flow to ensure that all layers of the Organization implement this change.