



18 January 2023

Dear Secretary-General,

Like you, we welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the new, gender-neutral and inclusive framework on parental leave as proposed by the International Civil Service Commission (Resolution 77/256/A-B).

This new framework, which required extensive cooperation and advocacy by staff unions and management counterparts, provides 16 weeks for both parents in addition to 10 weeks for the birth mother. Leave can be taken within a year of becoming a parent. The alignment of leave for both parents responds to your gender parity strategy and enables the equal sharing of childcare responsibilities.

The administrative instruction implementing the policy was consulted by your management with staff unions in advance so that it could enter in force promptly on 1 January 2023, following General Assembly approval.

Among the elements agreed between staff and management was the equal treatment of all parents who would still be eligible for parental leave as of 1 January 2023, therefore including children born in 2022. This would ensure for example that the mother of a child born on 31 December 2022 would not have to return to work two months earlier than the mother of a child born on 1 January 2023, and for a non-birth parent three months earlier. This is in line with general human resource practice under which an improvement in benefits is applied to all eligible staff.

The relevant paragraph in the final resolution reads as follows:

"Welcomes the establishment of the new parental leave framework, requests the Secretary-General to implement the framework in the Secretariat of the United Nations within existing resources, on an exceptional basis, for the year 2023, and encourages executive heads of other organizations of the common system to follow such practice."

Antonio Guterres
UN Secretary-General

cc: Louis Germain, President of the Staff-Management Committee
Catherine Pollard, USG of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
Martha Helena Lopez, ASG of the Office of Human Resources

You will note that there is no restriction regarding eligibility in 2023 for children born in 2022 and that the remark on operating within existing resources is moot, as no additional resources were requested.

We are therefore dismayed that three weeks after the UN General Assembly's approval, the ASG of the Office of Human Resources indicated to staff federations that parents whose children were born in 2022 but are still eligible for the benefit in 2023 will now not benefit from the new framework but will instead in 2023 still be subject to the old framework (16 weeks for the mother and one month for the father). This despite the earlier agreement in the draft policy that there would be retroactivity.

Your commitments last year to the unions on the eligibility in 2023 for children born in 2022 raised hopes and expectations among UN parents, many of whom have been in touch with us since the start of the year and who have justifiably been planning accordingly, some taking decisions with hefty financial implications regarding housing, travel or unpaid leave for the staff member and their partner. By going back on your commitments at this late stage, you are excluding most currently eligible parents and denying most currently eligible children the right to the WHO-recommended six months of exclusive breastfeeding.

We would therefore be grateful for your urgent confirmation that you will be keeping to your initial good faith commitments on this important issue, that is both vital to staff and to successful implementation of your gender parity strategy. We urge you not to let staff and young children down.

Yours sincerely,

Executive heads of the Staff Unions and
Associations of the United Nations:

Marco Roncarati, President, ESCAP Staff Association

Mark Polane, President, UN Field Staff Union

Mona Fattah, President, ESCWA Staff Council

Mahamadou Nassirou Ba, President, ECA Staff Union

Pamela Villalobos, President, ECLAC Staff Council

Gloria Otieno, President, UN Criminal Tribunals Staff Union

Michael Lund, Chair, UNDP/UNFPA/UN-Women/UNOPS Staff Council

Nathalie Meynet, Chair, UNHCR Global Staff Council

Noma Owens-Ibie, President, UNICEF Global Staff Association

Bradford Smith, Executive Secretary, UNOG Staff Union

Aitor Arauz, President, UN Staff Union (New York)

Pamela Odhiambo, President, UN Nairobi Staff Union

Karin Esposito, President, UN Staff Union Vienna