

Policy Title	Policy for Special Leave
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Previous title (if any)	N/A
Policy objective	The purpose of this policy is to provide staff members with special leave to address individual circumstances that cannot be managed through other leave provisions.
Target audience	All staff members
Risk control matrix	Control activities that are part of the process are detailed in the Risk Control Matrix
Checklist	N/A
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Policy owner unit	Division for Human Resources
Approval	Link to signed approval template

Policy for Special Leave

I. Purpose

1. The purpose of the special leave policy is to establish the conditions under which a staff member may apply for or be placed on special leave.
2. This policy does not apply to inter-agency exchanges within the United Nations system, or internal movements within UNFPA.

II. Policy

3. This policy establishes the following:
 - a. Definitions;
 - b. General Provisions;
 - c. Eligibility and Applicability;
 - d. Reason for special leave;
 - e. Conditions and Duration;
 - f. Liens against posts;
 - g. Requests and authorization for special leave;
 - h. Implementation of special leave;
 - i. Return to service after special leave without pay;
 - j. Separation from service;
 - k. Roles and Responsibilities;
 - l. Adjustments of benefits and entitlements.

A. Definitions

4. The following definitions apply for the purpose of the present policy:
 - a. *Position*: a role within the organization as defined in a job description that includes the level of responsibility, accountability and nature of work that is performed.
 - b. *Post*: a job that is classified to determine the appropriate category and grade level for compensation and budget purposes.
 - c. *Special leave*: the authorized absence from a staff member's work duties granted to a staff member for purposes other than those covered by annual leave, sick leave, parental leave or home leave.

- d. *Specific lien*: the staff member returns to a specified post at the end of the agreed period of leave. The post is normally the one occupied prior to availing of special leave.

B. General provisions

5. This policy applies to all UNFPA staff members holding permanent, fixed-term or temporary appointments.
6. While on special leave, a staff member retains their status as a UNFPA staff member and as such is still bound by the [Staff Regulations and Staff Rules of the United Nations](#), the [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#) and other applicable policies and administrative issuances.
7. Special leave may be granted as:
 - a. Special leave with full pay (SLWFP);
 - b. Special leave with partial pay (SLWPP); or
 - c. Special leave without pay (SLWOP).
8. Special leave is not an entitlement. Approval of special leave is dependent upon the nature of and reasons for the request, operational necessity, availability of resources and replacements, as well as the interests of UNFPA.
9. Salaries, benefits and entitlements are reduced according to the type of special leave granted, as described below.

C. Eligibility and Applicability

10. A UNFPA staff member holding a permanent appointment or a fixed-term appointment under the [United Nations Staff Regulations and Staff Rules](#) is eligible to apply for special leave under the conditions in this policy.
11. A staff member holding a temporary appointment is only eligible for special leave if compelling circumstances exist, such as a medical emergency, the death of an immediate family member or in case of a serious family emergency.
12. Any type of special leave shall not be approved for governmental service in a political office, in a diplomatic or other representational post, for the purposes of performing any functions that are incompatible with the staff member's status as an international civil servant (e.g. running for political office), or to await the outcome of an election or a political nomination.

D. Reasons for special leave

Reasons for special leave with full or partial pay

13. SLWFP or SLWPP may be authorized for:

- a. Cases of extended illness after all sick leave entitlements have been exhausted and pending the determination of disability benefits by the [Pension Fund Committee](#);
- b. Compelling external reasons, such as extreme conditions of national security or a life-threatening situation;
- c. Compelling personal circumstances including the death of an immediate family member;
- d. Jury duty and appearance in court as a witness;
- e. Approved periods of time for academic studies at the expense of the organization;
- f. Reasons that are in the interest of the organization, including in the event of temporary office closure during emergencies, when staff members are unable to work remotely due to the nature of their functions.

Reasons for Special leave without pay

14. SLWOP may be authorized:

- a. To accompany a spouse or domestic partner¹, who has been assigned to work in a different location;
- b. To allow additional time for a parent to take care of their child following parental leave;
- c. For academic studies at the expense of the staff member;
- d. When a staff member is to be reinstated to a permanent or fixed-term appointment and any period between separation and re-employment cannot be covered by accrued annual leave;
- e. For military service (in accordance with [Appendix C of the United Nations Staff Rules](#));
- f. To allow additional time after special leave with full pay as per paragraph 13 c. in case of the death of an immediate family member or in case of a serious family emergency, such as a serious illness;

¹ The term ‘domestic partner’ is equivalent to the term ‘legally recognized partner’ in the [SGB on Personal Status for Purposes of UN Entitlements](#).

- g. For other compelling personal reasons, such as time off after returning from a non-family duty station;
- h. To carry out a technical assignment with a governmental, non-governmental or private institution, which is in the interest of the organization.²
- i. To protect the pension benefits of staff members who are within two years of reaching the early retirement age or who are above that age and within two years of important Pension Fund or medical insurance thresholds;
- j. To allow time to find another assignment with UNFPA, while the staff member is unassigned, up to the maximum limit of two years;
- k. If such leave is in the interest of the organization, as determined by the respective Deputy Executive Director as per paragraph 38.

E. Conditions

- 15. A staff member returning to active service from SLWOP must complete one full tour of duty as defined in [UNFPA's Policy for Fixed Term and Continuing Appointments: Staffing](#) or five years of continuous service before applying for another period of SLWOP. This provision does not apply when special leave is requested following the death of an immediate family member or in case of a serious family emergency as per paragraph 14 f.
- 16. SLWOP is granted for a specific reason. If the initial reason changes during the course of the approved SLWOP, a staff member is obliged to submit a new request to the approving authority for reconsideration.
- 17. SLWOP is only granted up to the expiration date of the staff member's appointment. However, if the appointment is extended during the SLWOP, the duration of the SLWOP may also be extended.
- 18. Staff members on special leave may pursue outside activities/employment only if it is permissible under UNFPA's [Policy for Outside Activities and/or Honors, Decorations, Favors, Gifts, Awards, Remuneration from Outside Parties](#) (Policy for Outside Activities) and if they have submitted a request for an outside activity or employment, which has been approved by the Director of the Division for Human Resources (DHR). Staff members should submit their request as early as possible to allow sufficient time for review.

² Please also refer to [UNFPA's Policy for Outside Activities and/or Honors, Decorations, Favors, Gifts, Awards, Remuneration from Outside Parties](#).

19. Failure to secure a prior authorization before engaging in an outside employment arrangement will be treated as a violation of [Staff Regulation 1.2 \(o\)](#), [Staff Rule 1.2 \(r\)](#) and UNFPA's Policy for Outside Activities and will result in appropriate action by UNFPA.
20. Approval to undertake an outside employment whilst on SLWOP will not be granted, unless the experience acquired through the outside employment is beneficial to the organization when the staff member returns to active service with UNFPA; if the SLWOP was granted to support a UNFPA spouse or domestic partner recognized partner who has been assigned for their work to a different location; or if an overriding organizational interest exists.
21. A staff member cannot have dual contractual status within the United Nations system. A UNFPA staff member on special leave may not accept an appointment or employment contract within UNFPA or any agency in the United Nations system.
22. A staff member wishing to take up employment with another United Nations agency whilst on SLWOP must return to active status and request release for purposes of inter-organization mobility on a loan or secondment. In the case of a transfer, a staff member transferring from UNFPA to another organization ceases, as from the date of transfer, to have any contractual relationship with UNFPA. Consequently, any special leave agreements end automatically as of the date of the transfer.
23. A staff member wishing to take up employment within UNFPA on a temporary or detail assignment must return to active status to undertake this assignment.

F. Duration

24. SLWFP may be requested for the following compelling personal circumstances:
 - a. In the event that a fetus is miscarried on or after the 20th week of pregnancy prior to delivery, the gestational parent may be granted up to two calendar weeks of SLWFP.
 - b. In the event that a child is stillborn, the gestational parent may be granted up to four calendar weeks of SLWFP in lieu of their balance of parental leave.
 - c. In the event that a child of any age, spouse, domestic partner, sibling or parent passes, the staff member may be granted up to two calendar weeks of SLWFP.
 - d. SLWFP for this purpose should be taken immediately following the death of the family member. Staff members must provide a copy of the certificate of death from a licensed medical practitioner to the office of the United Nations Medical Director.

25. Special leave of any type for a staff member holding a permanent or fixed-term appointment may be requested for a specific period of up to a maximum of 12 months.
26. Extensions beyond 12 months will be reviewed and may be approved by the Director of the Division for Human Resources (DHR), on an exceptional basis.
27. The total period on SLWOP shall not, in any event, exceed 24 months, except where SLWOP is granted for the purpose of supporting a UNFPA spouse or domestic partner who has been assigned for their work to a different location, in which case it shall not exceed 48 months.
28. A request for special leave for a staff member holding a temporary appointment should not exceed a period of up to two weeks, and may not be approved to extend a contract beyond its expiration date

G. Liens against posts

29. SLWFP or SLWPP is granted with a specific lien on the post the staff member encumbers.
30. A staff member holding a specific lien may only return to their position once the period of special leave has ended.
31. A staff member on SLWOP is normally not granted a specific lien.
32. A staff member who is not granted a specific lien must successfully apply and be selected on a competitive basis for a vacant post in order to return to active, paid service. They will be treated as an internal candidate for the selection process.
33. If the post of a staff member is abolished during the course of the authorized special leave, UNFPA's [Policy for Organizational Structuring](#) applies. The head of unit³, in consultation with DHR, must ensure that the staff member is informed of any developments in a timely manner, including the sharing of information about the realignment process, the abolition of the post, and an invitation to apply for available vacancies in UNFPA.

III. Procedures

A. Requests and authorization for special leave

³ The head of unit refers to the representative, division director, regional or subregional director, country representative or director, or head of office in countries without a UNFPA representative. This task can be undertaken by the delegated officer as appropriate.

34. Requests for special leave should be made in writing and submitted to the head of unit at least two months before the staff member anticipates taking such leave, unless compelling circumstances prevent an earlier submission.
35. In their request, the staff member must provide in writing the specific reason(s) that justify such an adjustment in accordance with paragraphs 13 and 14 and the planned period of leave.
36. Requests for special leave must be endorsed by the head of unit before they are forwarded to the approving authority.
37. The respective Human Resources Business Partner, or during their absence a delegated member of their team, has the authority to approve:
 - a. SLWOP for additional time following the birth or adoption of a child as per paragraph 14 b;
 - b. SLWOP for the death of an immediate family member or in case of a serious family emergency, such as a serious illness, as per paragraph 14 f.
38. The respective Deputy Executive Director has the authority to grant special leave with full, partial or without pay in the interest of the Organization as per paragraphs 13 f and 14 k.
39. The Director, DHR is the approving authority for all other types of special leave.
40. When reviewing a request for special leave, the head of unit and the approving authority must take into account that special leave is not an entitlement. Approval of special leave is dependent upon the nature of and reasons for the request, operational necessity, availability of resources and replacements as well as the interests of UNFPA.
 - a. A staff member's circumstances should be considered and accommodated to the extent possible.
 - b. Perceived discrimination (any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on, including but not limited to, a person's race, sex, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, social origin or other status) in authorizing special leave could be considered to be prohibited conduct as per the [Policy for the Prohibition of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Abuse of Authority and Discrimination](#).
 - c. A request that is not approved for reasons of operational necessity or availability of resources and replacements, shall not normally be considered discrimination within the meaning of this policy.

B. Implementation of special leave

41. Upon approval of any type of special leave, the approving authority will communicate to the staff member the terms of the special leave. Staff members will be informed of the following:
- a. They retain their status as a UNFPA staff member and as such are still bound by the [United Nations Staff Regulations and Staff Rules](#), the [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#) and other applicable policies and administrative issuances;
 - b. Effective starting date of the special leave;
 - c. Expiration date of the special leave;
 - d. Whether the special leave is approved with a lien against a specific post, including the post number;
 - e. If the special leave is without pay and is for more than 30 calendar days, a notification that:
 - i. The staff member will not earn service credit toward seniority, salary increments, sick leave, annual and home leave, repatriation grant or termination indemnity;
 - ii. Continuous service in the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) will accrue only if the staff member arranges to continue to pay both their own contribution plus the organization's contribution during the leave period;
 - iii. Health and life insurance will continue only if a staff member arranges to continue to pay both their own contribution plus the organization's contribution during the leave period.
 - iv. The staff member's visa status may be affected and the staff member is required to ensure that they have a valid visa for the location where they will reside during their special leave and upon return to the duty station of assignment.
 - f. Staff members on special leave may pursue outside activities/employment only if it is permissible under the Policy for Outside Activities and if they have submitted a request for an outside activity or employment, which has been approved by the Director, DHR.
42. The staff member must confirm that they have received and accept the terms of the special leave and that they understand their obligations during special leave, including that they continue to be bound by the United Nations Staff Regulations and Staff Rules, the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service and other applicable policies and administrative issuances.

43. A staff member must provide contact information such as telephone numbers and mailing address. Staff members are required to keep the respective Human Resources Business Partner updated of any change in the information provided while on special leave.
44. Prior to taking special leave of any type, staff members are required to settle any outstanding obligations and undergo the necessary clearance procedures as applicable.
45. Prior to taking SLWOP a staff member needs to exhaust their annual leave, except in the following cases where the annual leave balance is maintained:
 - a. SLWOP granted for military service;
 - b. SLWOP following parental leave entitlement; or
 - c. When in the interest of the organization.
46. In case of separation upon expiry of SLWOP, whether it is a termination or agreed separation, the salary scale to be used for the payment of final entitlements is the salary scale in effect on the last day prior to the start of the special leave period.

C. Return to active service after special leave

47. A staff member on special leave holding a lien against a specific post must notify the respective unit of their return at least three months prior to the end of their special leave period. If the special leave is shorter than three months, they must indicate their intention to return when commencing their special leave.
48. For a staff member without a specific lien, return to active service depends on successfully applying to a vacant post with UNFPA. This process must begin during the period of SLWOP.
49. A staff member bears the responsibility of contacting the respective Human Resources Business Partner and/or their office's Human Resources focal point and:
 - a. beginning an active search for suitable vacancies;
 - b. requesting an extension of SLWOP within the maximum period; or
 - c. resigning from UNFPA.
50. The Human Resources Business Partner or delegate, as appropriate, will, whenever possible, recommend the staff member as a candidate to be reviewed along with other applicants, for UNFPA vacancies at the same grade level as the staff member's level and for which the staff member is qualified. The staff member will be informed if they are being considered for any suitable vacant post.
51. If at the end of the SLWOP, the staff member's efforts to find a post are unsuccessful and the SLWOP has not reached the allowable maximum of two years, the staff member may

request an additional extension of SLWOP to search for a suitable post as per paragraph 14 j.

D. Separation from service after special leave without pay

52. If the staff member is selected for a suitable post⁴ in UNFPA but they do not accept it, UNFPA may separate the staff member for abandonment of post upon expiration of their approved period of special leave. The staff member will continue to be considered as an internal candidate for the vacant posts for which they apply while on SLWOP.

53. If a specific lien to a post is not granted and the staff member has not secured another assignment by the end of the SLWOP, the staff member will be separated when the SLWOP expires.

54. In case of separation, compensation in lieu of any applicable notice period will be made.

IV. Other

A. Roles and responsibilities

55. Head of unit responsibilities include:

- a. Submitting requests for special leave to approving authority for decision;
- b. Temporarily filling a vacant position by an appropriate contract;
- c. Sharing realignment process information with a staff member, an early notification of the abolition of the post and extending invitations to apply for available vacancies in UNFPA.

56. Human Resources Business Partner responsibilities include:

- a. Recommending the staff member as a candidate for UNFPA vacancies at the same grade level as the staff member's level and for which the staff member is qualified.
- b. Informing the head of unit of any changes to the information provided by the staff member.

57. Staff member responsibilities include:

- a. Submitting requests for special leave to the head of unit;
- b. Providing contact information and keeping the Human Resources Business Partner updated of any change in the information provided while on special leave;
- c. Settling any outstanding obligations and undergoing the necessary clearance procedures as applicable such as exit interview and signed attendance records;
- d. Complying with the safety and security measures under the respective UNFPA Security Plan during special leave;

⁴ UNFPA shall consider whether the internal applicant has the requisite core and functional competencies for the post. Experience, knowledge and institutional memory relevant to the functions will be considered favorably.

- e. Reporting to the Legal Unit any occurrence of any issue related to privileges and immunities during the special leave in line with [Staff Regulation 1.1\(f\)](#);
- f. Obtaining a requisite visa in the event that they wish to remain in the duty station during special leave for personal reasons;
- g. Handing over equipment, identification cards granted to them before commencing any form of special leave;
- h. Applying for vacancies in UNFPA to be able to be reabsorbed into the organization at the end of the special leave as needed.

B. Adjustments of benefits and entitlements

Salary, benefits and entitlements

- 58. Staff members on SLWFP or SLWPP will not accrue qualifying service towards the rest and recuperation entitlement for the period of the special leave.
- 59. Danger Pay is not payable to staff members while on special leave.
- 60. A staff member on SLWFP is considered as being on duty status and continues to receive full salary and all other benefits and entitlements other than Danger Pay. They also continue to accrue service time towards their benefits and entitlements.
- 61. A staff member on SLWPP will receive salary, benefits and entitlements in the proportion determined in the approval decision.
- 62. When a staff member is granted SLWPP for extended illness, they receive their education grant in full, if applicable. Otherwise the amount of the education grant and related benefits shall be prorated on the basis of the period of eligible service compared to the full academic year.
- 63. Staff members on SLWOP do not receive salary, benefits or entitlements from UNFPA. However, when a staff member is on SLWOP, the amount of the education grant and related benefits shall be prorated on the basis of the period of eligible service compared to the full academic year.

Health and life insurance

- 64. SLWFP does not interrupt the coverage of a staff member under the health and/or life insurance plans to which they have subscribed and contributions of staff member and UNFPA remain unchanged.
- 65. For SLWPP, UNFPA will pay its contribution in proportion to the partial pay, and the staff member has to cover the remaining premiums.

66. SLWOP of less than 30 calendar days does not interrupt the coverage under health and/or life insurance plans to which a staff member has subscribed. The contributions of a staff member and UNFPA remain the same and are paid in full during the leave.
67. In the case of SLWOP for 30 calendar days or more, a staff member has the option to continue the coverage by making full payment, i.e. their contribution plus UNFPA's contribution, of the premiums. UNFPA does not subsidize health or life insurance coverage during SLWOP of 30 calendar days or more.
68. [After Service Health Insurance \(ASHI\)](#) may be available to a staff member who has been on SLWOP and separates from the organization, if the staff member opts for continuing coverage and meets the eligibility criteria.

Appendix D

69. A staff member on special leave is not covered under Appendix D to the United Nations Staff Rules that govern compensation for service-incurred death, injury or illness.

Malicious Acts Insurance Policy

70. A staff member on special leave is covered by the Malicious Acts Insurance Policy (MAIP) and must, therefore, comply with the safety and security measures under the UNFPA Security Plan of their location. Failure to comply with security instructions may invalidate the insurance coverage.

Pension fund

71. SLWOP or SLWPP does not interrupt staff member participation in the UNJSPF. For partial pay, UNFPA will pay its contribution in proportion to the partial pay, and the staff member will have to cover the remaining premiums.
72. SLWOP for less than 30 calendar days does not interrupt staff member participation in the UNJSPF. The contributions of the staff member and UNFPA remain the same and are paid in full during the leave.
73. In the case of SLWOP for more than 30 calendar days, the staff member has the option of continuing participation in the UNJSPF by making full payment, i.e. their contribution plus UNFPA's contribution. When staff members do not contribute to the UNJSPF during the period of SLWOP, they continue to be considered a participant in the Fund, but would not accrue pension rights for this period of non-contributory service. They would only be deemed to have separated from the UNJSPF after having completed a period of 36 months of SLWOP without concurrent contributions.⁵

⁵ For more information, please contact UNJSPF or access additional information available on the [UNJSPF website](#).

Service Periods

74. In case of SLWOP for less than 30 calendar days, relevant qualifying service periods shall continue to accrue.
75. In case of SLWOP for more than 30 calendar days, relevant qualifying service periods shall cease to accrue, including for purposes of time in post and service at a particular duty station.
76. Continuity of service shall not be considered broken by periods of special leave.

Privileges and immunities

77. Staff members continue to enjoy the privileges and immunities accorded to them as officials of the United Nations by the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.
78. A staff member is required to hand over their United Nations Laissez Passer to the head of unit or delegate before commencing special leave. Officials entering into special leave, who hold a residency visa in the Laissez-Passer should consult their Human Resources Business Partner for the correct handling of those visas while on special leave status.
79. If any issue related to privileges and immunities occurs during the special leave, the Legal Unit must be advised without delay.

Visa status

80. Visas which a staff member has been granted on the basis of their employment with the organization pertain to active service. Visas may lose their validity during the period of special leave.⁶
81. If a staff member on special leave wishes to remain in the duty station, they are responsible for obtaining the requisite visa. UNFPA will not sponsor or support any such applications and will abide by its obligations towards the host country.

Equipment and identification cards

82. Equipment and identification cards granted to a staff member on the basis of their employment with the organization must be handed over to the head of unit or delegate before commencing any form of special leave.

V. Process Overview Flowchart(s)

⁶ A staff member's authorization to stay in the United States expires automatically upon entry into special leave for more than 30 days, even if the G-4 visa in the passport indicates that it is valid beyond that date.

No overview flowchart available

VI. Risk Control Matrix

[The Risk Control Matrix can be found here.](#)