

UNDG

**JOINT GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE
EMPLOYMENT OF EXPATRIATE
SPOUSES**

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Executive Summary

1. The lack of facilities for the employment of UN expatriate spouses has emerged as a serious hindrance to the UN System's ability to recruit and retain the highest qualified specialists for overseas assignments, particularly women. The UNDG Joint Guidance Note on the Employment of Expatriate Spouses has been produced to address this growing concern. The UNDG Joint Guidance Note's main objective is to promote the employment of dual-career spouses, particularly in expatriate assignments.
2. The UNDG Joint Guidance Note rests on the principle that the process of selecting, recruiting and appointing an equally well-qualified UN expatriate spouse will be carried out in strict accordance with the participating agencies' internal policies and procedures.
3. The UNDG Joint Guidance Note strategies are two-fold:
 - a) ***With regard to employment within the UN System***, a UN Local Expatriate Spouse Association (hereafter referred to as UN/LESA) should be created in field and HQ¹ duty stations in an effort to take advantage of the skills readily available through equally well-qualified UN expatriate spouse. In addition, a Global Association of UN Expatriate Spouses (here after referred to as UN/GESA) will be established in Rome, as the Headquarter location of the World Food Programme (WFP), lead agency for this project, to globally coordinate the work of all LESAs and maintain a global web site. The aim of the Associations will be to search for solutions and find support to employment and career concerns of UN equally qualified expatriate spouses in dual-career and membership will be open to international expatriate spouses; *and*
 - b) ***With regard to employment outside the UN System***, the Guidance Note provides for efforts to be made by UN agencies to persuade governments to issue temporary work permits to expatriate spouses. Information networks on job opportunities will be developed locally. The UN Representations and Missions, along with the UN/LESAs referred to above will be instrumental in actively promoting spouse employment, through liaising and negotiating with international actors, NGOs, host governments and the diplomatic community.
4. The UN/LESAs should hold monthly meetings to review progress, develop new strategies and provide feedback on the strategies outlined above to the Heads of Missions or Representations who are responsible for implementing and monitoring the progress of the Guidance Note, as well as to the UN Resident Coordinator. In addition to these activities, UN/LESAs should produce "welcome packs" for distribution to newly arrived spouses, and provide information on services available in the country,

¹ Establishment of UN/LESAs at HQ duty stations is subject to agreement among the agencies present.

family support networks and any other general information to help spouses and families settling down.

5. The UNG Joint Guidance Note also aims at emphasizing the possibilities for self-employment and portable skills, while mentioning that international assignments also offer spouses opportunities to pursue career interests through non-remunerated activities, such as training for specific skills or volunteer work.
6. The Heads of Missions or Representatives will be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the progress of the agreed strategies while the UN Resident Coordinator should assume a lead coordinating role, or will designate an official for that purpose. The UN Resident Coordinator or his/her designate, in coordination with the UN Country Team (UNCT) should serve on a rotational basis as the UN liaison with the UN/LESAs, as well as with all other international actors, organizations and NGOs at the local level
7. At the level of HQ, Directors of Human Resources will be responsible for implementing the UNG Joint Guidance Note strategies and for monitoring progress, needs and achievements. Participating organizations, pooling together relevant data from all duty stations, will produce a consolidated yearly report.
8. In light of the above, the UNG is requested to:
 - a) Place the responsibility on the Heads of Missions or Representatives and Resident Coordinators in close collaboration with the heads of the Agencies at duty stations, to ensure that the Guidance Note is effectively implemented and monitored at the local level; *and*
 - b) Request the Directors of Human Resources in the various organizations to ensure that policies implementing the principles and strategies be either adopted or that existing internal policies be revised accordingly, and to establish a system for monitoring progress.

I. Introduction

9. Building on a number of initiatives launched over the past two decades,² UN organizations have agreed to pool their resources and adopt this UNDG Joint Guidance Note, which aims at permitting and encouraging the employment of UN expatriate spouses. The overall objective of this initiative is to enable the UN System to successfully continue to attract and retain highly qualified individuals, who are needed to achieve worldwide missions.
10. To encourage the participation of as many UN agencies as possible, the Guidance Note focuses on the following:
 - a) Expatriate recruitment, mobility and retention issues, which are common to most UN organizations;
 - b) Strategies, practices, and procedures that identify and pull together opportunities from within and outside the System at as many UN duty stations as possible;
 - c) Specific actions that encourage active participation and cooperation among them; *and*
 - d) Mechanisms for the creation of a network of UN equally well qualified expatriate spouses seeking support and answers to employment and career interests.
11. Given that employment guidelines are particular to each UN organization, participating institutions will consider the recommended practices and procedures to ensure compliance with internal policies and practices, as approved by its corresponding governing body.

² By way of example, in 1981, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 36/130 urging governments to adopt a more liberal approach towards work permits for spouses accompanying officials of foreign government and intergovernmental organizations. In 1991, UNDP convened a Spouse Employment Conference and thereafter piloted a Spouse Employment Coordinators Program.

II. Objectives and Principles

Guidance Note Objectives

12. The goals and objectives of the Guidance Note are as follows:
- a) Enhance the ability of the UN to attract, retain, and mobilize the highest specialized talent needed globally for its missions;
 - b) Adopt strategies, aimed at the achievement of worldwide mission objectives, which are primarily focused on the employment of dual-career equally well-qualified spouses in expatriate assignments;
 - c) Encourage active cooperation among participating organizations of the UN System at both headquarters and field offices;
 - d) Engage the cooperation of host governments, particularly in the issuance of temporary work permits for spouses of expatriate staff;
 - e) Encourage cooperation with bilateral aid agencies, diplomatic missions, non-governmental organizations, and the international private sector in order to pool resources that address career issues of expatriate spouses; *and*
 - f) Develop and disseminate duty-station-specific information on opportunities and resources in support of spouse employment and career concerns.

Guidance Note Principles

13. The following principles should be observed:
- a) Internal policies and procedures for the implementation of strategies will be defined or reviewed by individual participating agencies to ensure compliance and consistency with internal policies and practices;
 - b) Employment of equally well-qualified spouses should observe the relevant organization's recruitment, selection, and appointment policies and procedures;
 - c) A spouse may not participate in an assignment with a superior or subordinate in line of authority relationship to the other spouse. It is important to avoid conflict of interest and situations where a staff member would be called upon to pass a professional judgment on the performance of his or her spouse;

- d) One spouse can neither participate in nor exercise influence over any administrative process or decision that may affect the employment of the other spouse;
- e) A staff member and spouse will notify their respective UN System organizations of any assignment, within or outside the UN System, which may be perceived as a conflict of interest because of the nature of the work; *and*
- f) Internal recruitment guidelines should encourage managers to review on a preferential basis, over external applicants, the candidacy of equally well-qualified expatriate spouses from other participating UN organizations with offices in the same location as the assignment.

III. Guidance Note Strategies

Employment within the United Nations System:

14. “Employment within the UN System” denotes employment by either the agency for which the other spouse works or another UN organization, generally one with offices in the same duty station. Since employment policies and practices are particular to each agency, this UNDG Joint Guidance Note refers mainly to employment of UN equally well-qualified expatriate spouses from other UN organizations with particular attention to equally well-qualified spouses from participating agencies.
15. The employment of two equally well-qualified spouses within the UN System—referred to as dual-career spouses—offers many advantages to both the UN and the staff. The System’s overall goal of attracting, developing, and retaining the most competent staff is enhanced when equally well-qualified dual career spouses are able to plan career goals that are consistent with those of the UN. Simultaneously, the experience in varied UN assignments and duty stations enriches the spouse’s professional development with valuable UN technical cooperation core competencies.
16. The work permit restrictions are easily resolved, in most instances, by the UN’s ability to sponsor special work visas for services by foreign specialists. Significant financial savings may also result from avoiding costly transportation, subsistence, or relocation expenses. Thus, it is in the interest of UN organizations to take advantage of the talent readily available through equally well-qualified expatriate UN spouses. To ensure the highest benefit from this joint effort, UN agencies adopting the objectives and principles set out in this Guidance Note will pursue the following strategies:
 - a) Sponsor the creation of a Global Association of UN Expatriate Spouses (UN/GESA, suggested Terms of Reference, Annex II) in Rome, who will coordinate the work and activities carried out by the UN/LESAs at other headquarters locations and in the field. The UN/GESA will also be responsible for updating and maintaining the global web site set up as part of this Guidance Note, which will contain information provided by all UN/LESAs.
 - b) Sponsor the creation both locally and at HQ of UN/LESAs (Suggested Terms of Reference attached as Annex I);
 - c) Agencies may facilitate access to existing databases where information pertaining to working opportunities for equally well-qualified spouses at given duty stations is available. This information might also include skills inventory of equally well-qualified spouses, conditions of work within and outside the UN system, as well as volunteer and family support resources available locally;
 - d) Give preferential consideration, within the framework of their respective internal rules, over external candidates, to equally well-qualified expatriate spouse

applicants whose professional qualifications meet those specified in short-term and limited duration contracts such as short-term consultants, reimbursable loan, while actually employed, and UN volunteer;

- e) Facilitate special leave arrangements in support of the temporary relocation of spouses who are staff members in the UN common system accompanying an expatriate staff member of a participating UN organization. Whenever possible, the special leave conditions and criteria will be the same as those granted to a staff member accompanying a spouse within the same agency; *and*
- f) Facilitate, on a space-available basis, the participation of UN equally well-qualified expatriate spouses from other participating agencies in local induction or training programs, particularly those that strengthen transferable skills and competencies, such as language skills, computer and information systems skills, career counseling, resume preparation and managerial and supervisory skills.

Employment outside the United Nations System:

- 17. In spite of the obstacles cited, there are many employment opportunities outside the UN system for qualified UN expatriate spouses. Renewed efforts by UN agencies, along with initiatives from governmental and non-governmental organizations, should gradually persuade more governments of the benefits of issuing temporary work permits that allow highly or equally well-qualified UN expatriate spouses to contribute to the local economies.
- 18. Other challenges at the local level are less difficult to resolve—namely, the lack of information and networks on job opportunities, special skills requirements, childcare and other family support resources, volunteer and training opportunities. Resolving these issues is much easier when spouses unite forces. A central strategy of this UNDG Joint Guidance Note is the development of a network of UN/LESA. Indeed, equally well-qualified spouses can and must play a central role in this effort.
- 19. Bearing in mind that the network’s engine will be fueled by activities at the local level, initiatives to be pursued by the participating UN agencies and the UN/LESAs at each duty station, include:

UN Representations and Missions

- a) Actively promote and participate in the negotiation of formal agreements with host governments to facilitate the issuance of temporary work permits to UN expatriate spouses;
- b) Facilitate the establishment of the UN/LESA and support its functioning and integration into the UN/LESA;

- c) Network and promote spouse employment with non-governmental organizations, bilateral aid organizations, foreign embassies and consulates, educational institutions, multinational corporations, and other international employers present at the duty station; *and*
- d) Liaise with other international employers stationed locally in order to co-sponsor programs and activities in support of expatriate spouse employment and career pursuits.

Local Spouse Association of UN Expatriate Spouses

- a) Plan and organize an annual program of activities and strategies in support of the UN/GESA;
- b) Hold monthly meetings of association members to network and pool efforts, review progress, discuss new initiatives, develop new strategies, assign tasks, and provide feedback to global network; *and*
- c) Research global programs and resources to enhance the quality and scope of information available in the UN/GESA database.

Self-employment

- 20. “Portable” skills—such as tutoring, writing, catering, editing, translating, and photography—lend themselves to self-employment and telecommuting. The outsourcing of projects involving these skills is a growing trend within the public and private sectors. For many portable skills, the Internet is a huge facilitator, enabling spouses to work with institutions anywhere in the world. Such telecommuting has an added benefit for overseas workers. Normally, when institutions outside of the local economy outsource work, local work permits are not required. Information on self-employment possibilities ought therefore to be available from UN/LESAs.

Training and volunteer work

- 21. International assignments offer spouses opportunities to pursue career interests through non-remunerated activities. Indeed, both training and volunteer work can be personally rewarding and can further short- and long-term career goals.
- 22. Volunteering allows one to test “postponed” interests, explore a new career path, gain experience in a new field, develop specific competencies, make contacts, and, often, become familiar with an organization’s working culture. Occasionally, volunteer work can lead to paid employment. Some job-related volunteer activities include serving on a board of directors, organizing trips, interpreting or translating to help visitors, teaching

specific skills or providing counseling on local opportunities, organizing support or discussion groups, organizing fund-raising activities in support of local community needs, preparing newsletters, and designing posters.

23. Receiving training for specific skills—particularly portable skills related to tutoring or teaching, language interpretation and translation, journalism, and systems development—will undoubtedly also help open doors when competing for future jobs.
24. By and large, employers evaluate candidates based on their skills and work experience. Therefore, all training activities and volunteer work should be well documented and incorporated into a resume that stresses tasks performed and results achieved. Information on volunteer and training opportunities and resources could also be made available at UN/LESA.

IV. Responsibilities

25. Heads of Missions or Representatives in field offices will be responsible for the local implementation and monitoring of the progress of agreed strategies. The UN Resident Coordinator will assume the lead coordinating role, or will designate an official for this purpose.
26. The UN Resident Coordinator, in consultation with the UNCT should designate an official to serve on a rotational basis as the UN liaison with the UN/LESA as well with governmental and non-governmental organizations, bilateral aid organizations, diplomatic missions, educational institutions, multinational corporations, and other international employers at the duty station.
27. It is recommended that the UN Resident Coordinator, in consultation with the UN Country Team, coordinate, wherever necessary and to the extent possible, the identification and allocation of available office space and equipment to facilitate the work of the UN/LESA.
28. Directors of human resources will be responsible for implementing strategies at headquarters duty stations and for reviewing overall progress, needs, and accomplishments based on the GESA reports at the respective organization wide level.
29. The UN Resident Coordinator will gather relevant data from duty stations in order to produce a consolidated yearly report describing actual experiences, constraints and successes as well as suggesting adjustments that may be needed to the Guidance Note and its strategies. To this end, a tracking system will be set up by the different agencies, through which the UN Country Teams and HQ agencies will be able to monitor proper implementation of the Guidance Note.
30. Qualified spouses who are interested in employment while overseas will become members of the UN/LESAs and actively participate in researching information and opportunities to be shared with among the participating agencies.

Annex I

UN Local Expatriate Spouse Association Terms of Reference

The UN/LESA in (duty station/HQ) was established as part of the UN/GESA. The aim of the Association is to search for solutions and find support to employment and career concerns of UN equally well qualified expatriate spouses in dual careers.

The UN/LESA, whose members consist of expatriate spouses from all programmes and offices affiliated with the UN, aims at joining efforts in search of country specific information and resources that address the employment and career interests of equally qualified expatriate spouses. The UN/LESA is chaired by an expatriate spouse. A local staff member may be appointed as vice-chair, bearing in mind however that the thrust of this initiative is to assist international expatriate spouses in finding employment. The Association will:

- a) Promote the continuous exchange of information among expatriate spouses and with the sponsoring UN agencies on expatriate spouses career issues and resources;
- b) Identify the priority concerns and interests of expatriate spouses and define an annual work plan addressing them. Work groups can be designated to develop the priority objectives of the work plan.
- c) Liaise with other local expatriate spouse groups and associations, particularly from foreign services, the diplomatic community and multinational institutions to promote collaboration and exchange of information;
- d) Hold periodic meetings of Association members to review progress, discuss new initiatives, develop new strategies, define or revise assignments. Report periodically or on an *ad hoc* basis to the UN/GESA in Rome on activities undertaken.
- e) Submit to the UN/GESA the agreed program of work and an annual report of accomplishments;
- f) Produce “Welcome Pack” material for newly arrived expatriate spouses that include information on the services available in the country, family support network and organizations, and any other such information as may be deemed relevant. Where such “Welcome Packs” are already globally produced by an organization and thus already available at HQ level, the UN/LESA will adapt the information contained therein to local circumstances. The production of the material contained in Welcome Packs might involve cost sharing according to needs and available resources; *and*
- g) Generally assist newly-arrived expatriate spouses in settling down in the country by providing appropriate information and advice, including by facilitating the early identification of employment opportunities for expatriate spouses.

Annex II

UN Global Expatriate Spouse Association

Terms of Reference

The UN/GESA was established in (date) in Rome. The aim of the Association is to search for solutions and find support to employment and career concerns of UN equally well qualified expatriate spouses in dual careers.

The UN/GESA will:

- a) Coordinate the work and activities undertaken by all Local Expatriate Spouse Associations (UN/LESAs) based at headquarter locations and field duty stations;
- b) Act as the focal point between the UN/LESAs and each Agency participating in the implementation of this Guidance Note;
- c) Serve as a HQ duty station UN/LESA in Rome;
- d) Where appropriate, undertake negotiations with host governments in collaboration with the UN Representatives and Missions and the UN/LESAs, as well as with relevant foundations, third parties and diplomatic representations to gain work permits.

Annex III

Monitoring the implementation of the Guidance Note

The implementation of the principles and strategies developed in this Guidance Note will be monitored from both a quantitative and a qualitative standpoint, through straightforward questionnaires to be completed by the spouses themselves, as the beneficiaries of the Guidance Note.

The spouses concerned by the provisions and implementing measures of the Guidance Note will complete the following two-tier questionnaire, with the assistance of the country team liaison officer, designated by the UN Resident Coordinator.

Monitoring System: Spouses' Questionnaire

Name: _____

Nationality: _____

DOB: _____

Occupation: _____

Do you currently work?

I. Quantitative monitoring:

- Are you a member of the UN/LESA, and if so, since when?
- Were you provided with a brochure / welcome pack when you joined the UN/LESA?
- Has the UN/LESA briefed you on any (i) volunteering or (ii) training opportunities, or on (iii) the possible use of portable skills you may have?
- Have you attended any of the monthly meetings of the UN/LESA, and if so, what feedback, comments or suggestions would you give on these meetings?
- Have you been informed of, or been introduced to other local expatriate spouse associations?
- Have you been sponsored by any UN agency in order to obtain a work visa from the local authorities?
- Have you, through the Association, had any contact with NGOs, bilateral aid organisations, private enterprises, diplomatic missions, and/or any other international institutions and organizations present in the field?
- Have you been informed of or have you consulted any existing databases regarding employment opportunities?

II. Impact of the Guidance Note: quality monitoring

- To what extent, if any, has the UN/LESA been of any assistance to you identifying possible job opportunities, or in getting employment, including self-employment?
- To what extent have your priority concerns been addressed by the UN/LESA?

- Do you feel that this Guidance Note has assisted the UN in attracting qualified individuals, such as yourself?
- Was the host government of your country helpful and instrumental in your job search?
- To what extent have you benefited from the contacts you may have had through the UN/LESA with NGOs, bilateral aid organizations, private sector firms, diplomatic missions, or any other international organizations, with regard to your search for employment opportunities?
- Are you generally satisfied with the services provided by the UN/LESAs? Please provide details.
- Do you have any suggestions to make with a view to improving the services provided for by the UN/LESA?

Thank you for your time.