

Briefing Document

Lactation and Daycare Facilities in Parliaments

Good Practices in the Americas and the Caribbean

ParlAmericas' briefing documents present comparative research, policy considerations, and legislative action items on issues that matter to parliamentarians, with a focus on our membership in the Americas and Caribbean region.

Women in Latin America and the Caribbean spend almost three times as much time on unpaid care and domestic work as men.¹ Given this reality, the implementation of family-friendly policies in workplaces, including access to daycare and lactation support, can help reduce obstacles to equitable participation in these spaces. Such initiatives also increase the desirability of a workplace and the retention of talented employees, as well as elected and appointed officials. Further, when backed by a supportive institutional culture, family-friendly policies also play a role in transforming gender norms and improving the quality of life and productivity of workers of all genders.

Family-friendly policies help to balance and benefit both work and family life. They typically provide three types of essential resources needed by parents and caregivers of young children: time, resources, and services.² Examples of family-friendly policies include:

- Flexible work arrangements (e.g. hours and scheduling that take school hours into consideration, proxy voting, etc.)
- Paid parental leave
- Paid lactation breaks
- Childcare support
- Paid leave to care for sick family members

Because of their histories as male-dominated spaces, parliaments' institutional design, architecture, symbols and traditions have been built with men in mind, creating formal and informal challenges for women and marginalized or minority groups. Research³ and the experience of women parliamentarians⁴ confirms that parliaments are gendered workplaces and that conditions including physical infrastructure shape advantages and disadvantages, impacting one's ability to perform work in them.⁵ Updating the

¹ [Care Work and Care Jobs](#), International Labour Organisation, 2018

² UNICEF, [Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the Workplace of the Future](#), 2019.

³ Erikson, Josefina and Cecilia Josefsson, "The Parliament as a Gendered Workplace: How to Research Legislators' (UN)Equal Opportunities to Represent," *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 75, Issue 1, January 2022, pgs. 20-38. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/pa/article/75/1/20/5917170>

⁴ See, for example, the experiences shared by former parliamentarians from Canada, Saint Lucia, and Barbados on pages 16-22 of the ParlAmericas publication [Gender-based Political Harassment: Building Awareness in Parliaments](#), 2016.

⁵ Erikson, Josefina and Cecilia Josefsson, "The Parliament as a Gendered Workplace: How to Research Legislators' (UN)Equal Opportunities to Represent," *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 75, Issue 1, January 2022, pgs. 20-38. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/pa/article/75/1/20/5917170>

policies and physical spaces will support in overcoming these challenges, obtaining the benefits mentioned above for staff and the parliament itself, and signal that the parliament is space meant for all. As sites of national representation and decision making, it is important for parliaments to strive to be model workplaces for society, where the conditions of labour are based on dignity, equity, and the highest standards of human rights. Implementing family-friendly institutional policies for parliamentarians and employees alike is one way to contribute to achieving this objective and advance towards a gender-sensitive parliament.

This briefing guide focuses on efforts to facilitate access to childcare supports, in particular, given the interest in and increasing prominence of these actions in parliaments across the region.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021), a **gender-sensitive parliament** is a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods, and in its work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women’s full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large.⁶

Promoting the adoption of care policies and initiatives within parliament itself can also provide an entry point for legislative work to recognize, value, redistribute, regulate, and promote care work⁷ in society more broadly. Some examples of approaches parliaments can take to contribute to these objectives through legislation are outlined below:

- **Guaranteeing the right to care, be cared for, and to exercise self-care** provides an opportunity to recognize and value care work, which has historically been invisibilized and undervalued, as an essential contribution to the well-being of individuals and communities.
- **Protecting the labour rights of individuals who perform care work**, who often face precarious conditions and lack protection and equitable compensation, through legislation can ensure fair salaries, limits on the length of working days, paid vacation, and access to social security.
- **Promoting gender equality and the redistribution of care tasks**, as stereotype-driven cultural patterns result in most unremunerated care work falling disproportionately on women,⁸ limiting their participation in paid employment and, consequently, their economic autonomy. Legislation can establish mechanisms to share responsibility for care work among families, the community, the private sector, and the State (also known as “co-responsibility”) and facilitate better work-life balance for carers.

⁶ [Plan of Action For Gender Sensitive Parliaments](#). Inter Parliamentary Union, 2021.

⁷ Care work is a central component of society as all people depend on others for care at some point in their lives and because care is essential for all individuals’ physical, biological, and emotional well-being and needs. This work involves tasks that are seen as more direct individual care, including the provision of food, shelter, cleaning, healthcare, and support, and others that are less direct, such as household maintenance and education. Whether or not these tasks are remunerated or not, they are considered work as they require the time, money, and physical effort of the caregiver. For more information on care work and the importance of its inclusion in legislative work, see this briefing note prepared by ParlAmericas: https://www.parlAmericas.org/uploads/documents/Briefing_CareWork_ENG.pdf

⁸ On average, 74% of unremunerated care work is performed by women, dedicating almost triple the time to these activities than men. (Source: [The Care Society: A Horizon for Sustainable Recovery with Gender Equality](#), ECLAC, 2022)

- **Highlighting the economic and social development connections of the care agenda**, given that the care economy is one of fastest-growing economic sectors in the region.⁹ Legislation can enable the creation of formal employment in this sector and drive investment in high-quality care services and infrastructure.¹⁰
- **Taking a comprehensive approach to protecting human rights** by considering gender equality, intersectional, and intercultural perspectives when contributing to the creation or strengthening of integrated care systems.

The following frameworks and resources may also help to guide your legislative work on care:

- [Buenos Aires Commitment](#) adopted at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023)
- [C183 - Maternity Protection Convention](#) (ILO, 2000)
- [Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work](#) (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018)
- [Declaration on Legislative Perspectives for Inclusive Economic Growth: Investing in the Care Economy](#) adopted at the 14th Gathering of the ParIAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (2022)
- [Inter-American Model Law on Care](#) (Inter-American Commission of Women and EuroSocial, 2022)
- [Toward Available, Affordable, and Quality Childcare in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (Women, Business, and the Law, 2022)
- [Towards the Construction of Comprehensive Care Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (UN Women and ECLAC, 2021)

⁹ Countries in the Americas and the Caribbean that have calculated the economic value of unpaid work in households estimate that it accounts for between 15.9 and 27.6 percent of the national Gross Domestic Product. (Source: [The Care Society: A Horizon for Sustainable Recovery with Gender Equality](#), ECLAC, 2022)

¹⁰ A robust public infrastructure to promote and protect care entails unemployment insurance, accessible and high quality health care, paid sick leave, appropriate immigration policies, and well enforced labour standards and laws, among others.

Lactation and daycare facilities associated with parliaments in the Americas and Caribbean

*Note: This table has been compiled through research and consultation with parliamentary staff members from various countries, but may not capture all existing facilities in the region. If you have any additional information on such practices, please let us know through info@parlAmericas.org.

Parliament	Implemented Action
<p>National Congress of Argentina</p>	<p>The Chamber of Deputies opened a family room in August 2016, during the World Breastfeeding Week, so that those who are breastfeeding can express and store their milk, as well as bottle-feed during the working day. The family room has two separate sections to maintain the privacy of each user, as well as a common area with a refrigerator, sink, and changing table. It also contains accessibility and inclusion features such as ramps, accessible handles, and signage that allows all workers to access the room.</p> <p>The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate also provide daycare services to parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. In the former case, the nursery, <i>El Gato Garabato</i>, was founded in 1987 as a result of the initiative of a woman parliamentarian. <i>El Jardín del Bosque</i>, the nursery in the Senate, was established in the same year. Both facilities are also approved by the Ministry of Education as early childhood education sites and provide attendees with access to educational programming.</p> <p>Source(s): <i>Más Inclusión: Diputados ya cuenta con una "sala de familia"</i> Diputados Argentina, 2017.</p>
<p>National Congress of Brazil</p>	<p>The Federal Senate established the Assistance Program for Breastfeeding Mothers through Presiding Officers' Directives 3/2016 and 3/2019. This program guarantees a six-hour workday for staff members until the last day of the month in which the child reaches 24 months of age.</p> <p>The Chamber of Deputies instituted the Monitoring and Support Program for Breastfeeding Mothers (<i>Pró-Mãe</i>) by Ordinance N° 90 of 5/13/2022. The program makes available breastfeeding and milk extraction rooms, a special 35-hour working week for employees who breastfeed, and psychosocial support for breastfeeding mothers when they return to work.</p>
<p>Parliament of Canada</p>	<p>The Parliament of Canada provides two childcare services which are accessible for those working on the premises. One of these, Children on the Hill, is a worksite daycare located within one of the buildings associated with Parliament; it is open to the children of parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and journalists in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. The other is an on-call childcare program and is available</p>

	<p>in the lower house of parliament for children between three months to 12 years old. Both services have associated fees covered by the user.</p> <p>Source(s): “New Childcare Option Offered for MPs as Parliament Tries to Modernize,” CTV News, June 16, 2016.</p>
<p>National Congress of Chile</p>	<p>The National Congress of Chile established a breastfeeding room in May 2023 for use by parliamentary staff, parliamentarians, advisors, visitors, and anyone else who requires it.</p> <p>Notably, Chilean labour regulations grant working parents the right to employer-provided childcare for children up to 2 years of age when the parent works for an organization with 20 or more staff. In the National Congress, this benefit is provided as a standard monetary contribution, which employees can use towards the monthly payment for daycare or the salary of a person who provides home care services.</p> <p>National law also confers a breastfeeding or feeding leave for parents with the custody of children under 2 years of age. This is implemented in Congress through a flexible schedule that allows a mother to breastfeed a) at any time during the working day; b) divide the schedule, at her request, into two portions, and c) postpone or advance the beginning or end of the working day by half an hour or one hour.</p> <p>Both congressional chambers also provide a special leave benefit for staff members, which allows them to attend to the needs of their children, parents, and other dependents in their care. Through a flexible workday arrangement, staff members are able to accompany their dependents to medical checkups and other appointments requiring their attendance.</p> <p>The Chilean Senate also has a protocol on balancing personal and family life in the workplace in the framework of its internal policy on work life quality (2022), organized under five pillars: 1) symbolic measures; 2) time management; 3) support for fulfilling family responsibilities, including leaves required by law; 4) support to caregivers; and 5) quality of time dedicated to personal care, seeking to protect time for rest, meals, and healthcare.</p> <p>Source(s): Derecho a Sala Cuna, Ministry of Education, webpage.</p>
<p>Congress of the Republic of Colombia</p>	<p>In compliance with Law 1823 of 2017, which called for the creation of family/lactation rooms in public and private workplaces, the Congress of the Republic adapted a space so that parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and contractors in periods of lactation can pump their milk, store it, and take it home to feed their babies. Users of the lactation facility are also offered training workshops by specialized personnel.</p>

	<p>A nurse manages the facility, which includes an extraction room and a complementary one with cubicles that can be used by four individuals at the same time. Following milk extraction, thermoses are available to ensure proper storage and transportation. The facilities also include a refrigerator, extractors, bottles, rocking chairs, nursing pillows, and other necessary items.</p> <p>Source(s): Sala para madres lactantes, en el Congreso, Isabel Colomna, Senado de la República de Colombia, 2020.</p>
Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica	<p>By agreement of the Legislative Directorate and the Executive Directorate, the Parliament of Costa Rica opened a lactation room for use by parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and visitors. The room was provisionally equipped with two sofas, a refrigerator to store breast milk, a sink, a changing table, and a hands-free diaper container. The space is located in the central building of the Legislative Assembly and is accessible through a ramp that meets the conditions of Law 7600 (the law on equal opportunities for persons with disabilities) for easier access for mothers with disabilities.</p> <p>Source(s): Asamblea Legislativa Habilita Sala de Lactancia, PAC Fracción Legislativa, 2018.</p>
National Assembly of Ecuador	<p>The National Assembly of Ecuador established a breastfeeding room open to officials and visitors in 2019. National legislation in Ecuador states that, within a six-hour working day, the employer must allow 20 minutes for postpartum breast milk expression for a period of 12 months.</p> <p>Source(s): Así se vivió en Tw la apertura de nuestra Sala de Apoyo a la Lactancia, Asamblea Ecuador, Twitter.</p>
Congress of the Republic of Guatemala	<p>Subsidized daycare is available for employees of the Congress, including parliamentarians. The Nursery of the Congress of the Republic was established in 2001 as a daycare and now provides care for children up to high school age. Children also have access to pediatric care, a nurse, a psychologist, and specialized childcare providers through the nursery.</p> <p>Source(s): JARDÍN INFANTIL CLAUSURA AÑO ESCOLAR, Moisés González, Congreso de la República de Guatemala, 2022.</p>
Congress of the Union of Mexico	<p>Both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies provide a lactation room facility called <i>Sala de Leche Materna del Congreso de la Unión</i>. The Congress also promotes the availability of care supports like the lactation room and parental leave through social media campaigns, the microsites of the gender technical units in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, and emails to staff.</p>

	<p>Source(s): "Se inaugura sala de lactancia materna en la Cámara de Diputados," Ministry of Health, October 9, 2014.</p>
<p>Congress of the Republic of Paraguay</p>	<p>A daycare for public sector employees in Paraguay was first created in 1999 in response to requests for such a service. This daycare then became the Children's Welfare Centre of the National Congress in 2009 because the service was primarily being used by staff of the Congress. It continues to offer services specifically for this group and for children of the staff in the Ministry of Women, and the two institutions are jointly responsible for its staffing and resources. The Centre is open to children between the ages of 3 months to 4 years old and provides educational, fine arts, and other programming. Regulations for the centre were approved and are outlined in Resolution No. 13/2018.</p> <p>Source(s): Centro de Bienestar Infantil del Congreso Nacional Congreso Nacional, Honorable Cámara de Senadores, webpage. Resolution No. 13/2018, Honorable Cámara de Senadores, April 16, 2018.</p>
<p>Parliament of Uruguay</p>	<p>The National Parliament of Uruguay has adopted Law N° 19.530 on breastfeeding rooms, an initiative that guarantees the right of women to breastfeed. The law establishes that all institutions in which 20 or more women work and/or study, or that have 50 or more total employees, must have a space set up exclusively for breastfeeding.</p> <p>The Legislative Palace has signed an agreement with the Child and Family Care Centres (CAIF, by its Spanish initials) Plan and the Ministry of the Interior that remodeled a previously operated nursery into a CAIF center so that the children of legislative workers have priority registration in these centers, where they are cared for six or seven hours a day and are provided with food according to their age.</p> <p>Source(s): Ley No 19.530 Salas de Lactancia Materna, República Oriental Del Uruguay Poder Legislativo.</p>

Lactation and daycare facilities associated with parliaments across the globe

Parliament	Implemented Action
Parliament of Australia	<p>In 2016, the Houses of Parliament overturned a house rule that banned children from entering the parliamentary chambers in favour of a “family-friendly” parliament. This decision now allows for breastfeeding and nursing politicians to bring their children into the chamber.</p> <p>Source(s): Provisions for a more family-friendly Chamber, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, & Canberra, July 19, 2016.</p>
National Parliament of Iceland	<p>Iceland’s Parliament adopted measures to create a more family-friendly environment in 2021, including shortening session schedules to enable better work-life balance and opening a nursery for use by staff and parliamentarians that includes diaper change facilities.</p> <p>Source(s): “Iceland’s Parliament reschedules sessions, opens nursery to be a more family-friendly workplace,” Gréta Sigríður Einarsdóttir, Iceland Review, February 4, 2021.</p>
Parliament of Uganda	<p>In 2015, Speaker Rebecca Kadaga launched the Shs 80m-Breastfeeding Centre for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff, located at the Office of the Prime Minister. The centre can accommodate up to 12 children and has caretakers on-site. Facilities consist of a kitchen, bathroom, outdoor playground, beds, and three separate lactating rooms. Parliament has a monthly budget for the centre and buys basic meals for the children, though most parents also provide food items for their children.</p> <p>Source(s): “Parliament’s breastfeeding centre leads way for women at the Workplace,” The Observer - Uganda, Olive Eyparu, April 26, 2017.</p>
Parliament of the United Kingdom	<p>A report commissioned in 2016 by former parliamentarian John Bercow recommended that mothers should be able to bring babies into the chamber and voting lobbies. In 2020, Sir Lindsay Hoyles, Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, lifted the ban on women MPs breastfeeding in the parliament chamber. This decision was a result of a campaign led by women parliamentarians and recommendations made by the administration committee to allow breastfeeding wherever it is appropriate in the Palace of Westminster.</p> <p>Source(s): The Good Parliament Report, Sarah Childs, UK Parliament, July 2016. “New speaker Lindsay Hoyle says female mps will be allowed to breastfeed in the Commons,” David Wilcock, Daily Mail Online, January 30, 2020.</p>

Take action to establish family-friendly policies in your parliament

If you wish to promote lactation or daycare facilities in your parliament as part of efforts to increase the institution's family-friendly nature, the following steps can be a guide to **ACT (assess, consult, transform)**:

STEP 1: Assess the current parliamentary facilities and regulations through a gender equality and inclusion lens.

Gather information and investigate whether the parliamentary facilities and regulations currently meet the needs of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff who have childcare responsibilities.

The following questions can be used to assess facilities and regulations with a gender-inclusive lens:

1. Do the current staff regulations, human resource policies, or guidelines enable and empower working parents to fulfill their care responsibilities?
 - a. Are care references absent in this documentation, signalling a gap that needs to be filled?
 - b. Are there outdated policies in place - even if these are not enforced - that need to be revised?
 - c. Are there informal good practices in place in the parliament already that could be strengthened by incorporating these into institutional documentation?
2. Are any childcare services or supports provided to parliamentarians or parliamentary staff?
3. Are there any accommodations, provisions, or designated spaces for lactating parents who are parliamentarians or parliamentary staff within or nearby the parliament's facilities? Is other childcare infrastructure in place for use by parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and visitors (e.g. baby changing tables)?
4. Has there ever been research conducted on good practices for family-friendly facilities or an in-depth review of what measures could be implemented in parliament and the related cost?

If any of the answers to the above questions are no, your parliament may want to assess opportunities to implement services, infrastructure, policies, or regulations that increase the parliament's accessibility to those with care responsibilities.

STEP 2: Consult with parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and other relevant stakeholders.

In order to inform any actions that are taken to increase the family-friendliness of the legislature, it is important to consult with parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, as the primary users of the space, regarding their specific needs.

Best practices and other guidance can likely also be provided by actors like: human resource or other administrative staff in the parliament, relevant ministries, the national gender machinery or gender technical unit in parliament, gender experts, and civil society organizations in the region.

STEP 3: Transform parliament into a more family-friendly environment.

Transformative action can be undertaken by creating an action plan to refurbish or create new facilities for care responsibilities, implementing new care services for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, and/or revising existing regulations.

Recognising that parliaments may have limited resources to allocate towards infrastructure updates or service provision, it is critical to be guided by the needs identified in assessment and consultation efforts to ensure you are pursuing the most effective course of transformative action. Looking into opportunities for partnership with other actors or organizations in taking on these actions could also be a helpful approach.

Further reading and resources

[Breastfeeding Support in the Workplace: A Global Guide for Employers](#) (UNICEF, 2020)

[Breastfeeding in the Workplace](#) (UNICEF, webpage)

[Technical Brief: Protect Breastfeeding in the Workplace](#) (Pan-American Health Organization, 2019)

[Essays on Equality: The Politics of Childcare](#) (The Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London, 2023)

[Policy Guide: Parental Leave](#) (ParlAmericas, 2020)

[Sustaining Parliamentary Action to Improve Maternal, Newborn and Child Health](#) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013)



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