Global practices of care in security institutions

Policy Brief - 1

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Monash University is leading a research project funded by Global Affairs Canada (2023-26) as part of the Elsie Initiative.[1] The project is the first to identify the causes and consequences of marginalising women with caring responsibilities[3] from military and police organisations (security institutions) in troop and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) and UN peace operations. This project aims to propose ways to reduce this marginalisation, thereby improving the meaningful participation of women, enhancing operational effectiveness and advancing gender equality. The expected results of the project also include UN peace operations and T/PCC security institutions being more gender-responsive and attentive to caring responsibilities and needs, including the self-care and well-being of personnel. In turn, this is anticipated to contribute to improved workplace cultures and a reduction of the factors that can contribute to stress, burnout and safeguarding cases, including self-harm and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

This Policy Brief maps publicly available best practices supporting people with caring responsibilities in security sector institutions. It is intended to form part of the basis for primary data gathering. Subsequently, this mapping exercise will be expanded to include best practices identified in our fieldwork across security sector institutions and UN peace operations.

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Introduction

This policy brief is informed by increasing awareness that security sector personnel with caring responsibilities often face challenges in their meaningful engagement in the sector and deployment to peace operations. The brief focuses on security institutions to map out existing and emerging care practices for personnel with caring responsibilities. It is done against the background that security personnel with caring responsibilities suffer career harm and women tend to suffer disproportionately given that they assume three-quarters of all care work globally.[4] During crises like pandemics[5] and armed conflicts[6] the burden of care is exacerbated. This policy brief argues that the nascent but increasing recognition of care as critical to gender equality in security institutions and peacekeeping needs to be sustained through policy learning in terms of lessons learned and best practices. It aims to encourage peer learning among T/PCCs that have committed to enhancing gender equality in peacekeeping.

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Defining the problem

The disproportionate burden of care carried by women is shaped by gender norms and expectations.[7] While historically, care work was not seen as 'work' and thereby required to be valued (and remunerated) in the same way as 'employment', progress is being made with increased attention to care work and caring responsibilities as economic activity or labour. While part of a broader trend, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness of the importance - and economic value - of care work and caring responsibilities.[8] This can be seen in efforts to develop matrices, indices and methods to understand challenges faced in the care economy, and communicate the contributions that the care economy makes to national development, including peace and security.[9] Despite improved awareness, substantive change is wanting, due to underlying gender norms shaping care work and expectations about who should assume caring responsibilities.[10] While such gender norms are difficult to change, they do actually change with persistent and intentional actions.[11] Therefore, sustained efforts are needed to generate the policy awareness required to generate conducive environments for people with caring responsibilities to thrive in both professional and domestic environments.

Female peacekeepers serving UNMISS. Photo: UNMISS/Eric Kanalstein, 2017

…security institutions - and efforts to build and sustain peace – suffer when carers are inadequately supported

This brief focuses on security institutions for two reasons. First, security institutions are considered highly gendered organisations, meaning gender norms and underlying gender biases affect their material and symbolic allocation of resources.[12] Corollary, carers are often marginalised in these institutions, in part arising from assumptions that caring responsibilities are extraneous to efforts to build and sustain peace and security. However, apart from the immediate effects on carers' careers, security institutions - and efforts to build and sustain peace – suffer when carers are inadequately supported. Security institutions suffer the aggregate impacts of inattention to carers since their skillsets are underutilised, diversity suffers, and staff well-being is compromised.[13] This is because the marginalisation of carers can translate into poor recruitment and retention rates, and sustain poor workplace cultures that don't recognise or value practices of care – care for others and self-care.[14] It can also undermine commitments to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and compromise credibility in missions or operations with commitments to gender equality or gender-responsiveness.[15]

Indonesian National Armed Forces personnel, training exercise. Photo: US Air Force/Staff Sgt Christopher Hubenthal, 2015

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Often, caring responsibilities deter female personnel from deploying,[16] leading to carers being unable to accumulate the same level of experience as non-carers needed for career advancement. This leads to the underrepresentation of women in peace operations or their departure from the security institution.[17] For example, 2022 figures from the UK Armed Forces show that more females are leaving than joining.[18] Comparable figures in the US show that lack of dependent care is among the key reasons why women are 28% more likely to leave military service than men.[19] Similar shortfalls in recruitment and retention against rates of turnover are reported in the Australian Defence Force.[20] In UN peace operations, as at 2022, women comprise only 7.8% of uniformed personnel, and the proportion of female troops from T/PCCs is only 6.8% (compared with the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy target of 9%).[21] This suggests that increasing recruitment of women into security institutions, and their subsequent deployment to peace operations, must go with policies that create a conducive environment to thrive if they become carers.

Members of the all-female Indian Formed Police Unit of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Photo: UN/ Christopher Herwig, 2008

Best Practices

Given the growing evidence on the operational effectiveness of diverse workforces,[22] and broad-based awareness that women's engagement is critical to successful efforts to build peace,[23] security institutions that have made commitments to increase women's representation and that engage in peace operations must address barriers that lead to the marginalisation of women. For example:

NATO Member States have reported increased policies and programmes to support work-life balance and flexible working, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic but part of a larger trend. The 2020 NATO Summary of National Reports[24] cited 17 NATO Nations who had reported specific policies and programmes supporting a greater work-life balance. Moreover, 26 NATO Nations reported some form of parental leave, while 17 NATO Nations reported some form of part-time employment for staff with caring responsibilities (childcare or care for the elderly or sick) or for educational studies, with only 8 NATO Nations stating that part-time employment was not available. The 2020 NATO Summary of National Reports underscored that such policies and programmes 'can help with the recruitment and retention of women in particular in national armed forces', also highlighting an increase in the percentage of women in the armed forces of 25 Member Nations during the reporting period.

The British Armed Forces have flexible maternity leave arrangements, including shared parental leave that extends up to 52 weeks.[25] Apart from 2 weeks of mandatory leave that a mother must take, the balance of leave, up to 50 weeks, can be converted into shared parental leave. This arrangement also covers adopting parents. Such an arrangement creates enough flexibility for parents to share childcare responsibilities. Since 2018, the UK Ministry of Defence has established flexible working options through the Flexible Working and You policy that allows service personnel to make alternative work arrangements.[26] For these policies, the Royal Airforce won the Working Families' Best for Mothers Award in 2020,[27] and the Army was a finalist for the same award in 2023.[28] The Army was also commended by Working Families in 2022 under the Best for Fathers Award category for initiatives introduced within its Flexible Working and You policy.[29]

Members of the British armed forces. Photo: Si Longworth Photography, 2013

The Indonesian National Police has implemented an Integrated Police Service Center[30] designed to include specialised service rooms, such as facilities for those with disability, children play areas with a reading nook functioning as a mini-library, a lactation room, and a compliant service space. Among other things, these integrated centres provide an inclusive working environment for persons with caring responsibilities and special needs.

The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) allows personnel to take leave for up to 4 years to, among other things, care for children, sick and/or aged parents and accompany children with special needs.[31]

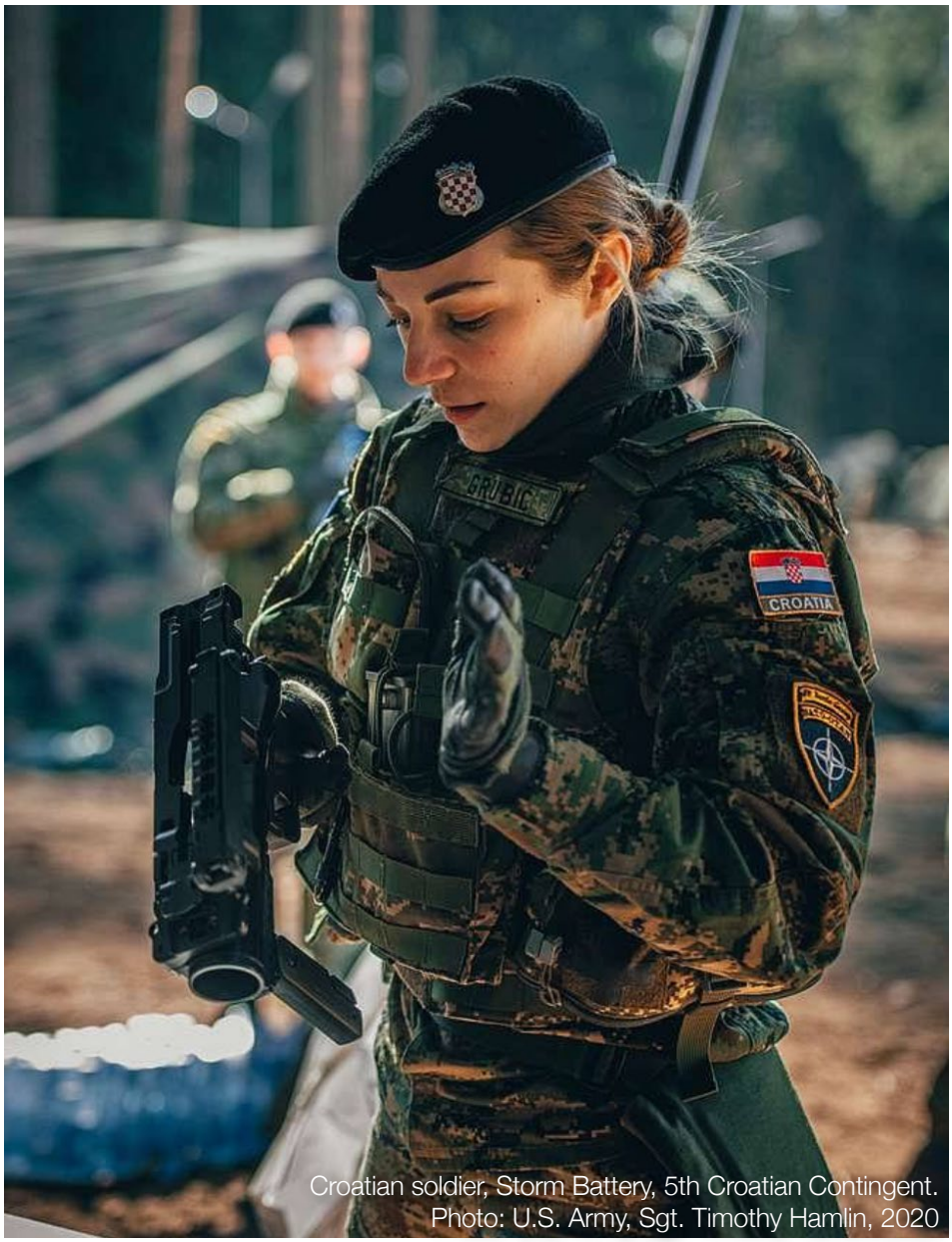
Indonesian peacekeepers serving the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Photo: UN/Pasqual Gorriz, 2009

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) provide a maximum combined 1 year of maternity or parental leave including 16 weeks of maternity leave and 37 weeks of parental leave.[32] Medical support is provided throughout. The CAF provides 4 to 6 weeks paid vacation yearly. Additionally, there are wellness programmes on healthy lifestyles and stress management, as well as family counselling. The CAF also provides compassionate status, which allows for geographic postings for reasons such as family related issues. The Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services provides support to members and their families. Bases and wings have Military Family Resource Centers which work with military families to achieve work-life balance. In response to COVID-19, the CAF employed a liberal work from home approach. The CAF Retention Strategy adopts strategic objectives to increase the number of underrepresented groups, improve career management and opportunities, and enhance work-life balance for families.[33]

Indian Military and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF): The Indian Armed Forces have been providing male officers paternity and childcare leave of 24 weeks,[34] and female officers 26 weeks of maternity leave, 52 weeks of childcare leave and 26 weeks of child adoption leave, all of which were recently extended to all women in the military irrespective of their ranks, thereby entitling women soldiers, sailors and air warriors to reap these benefits and be at par with their officer counterparts.[35] The Armed Forces also provide full education concession and various scholarships to the children (up to two) of serving, retired, Missing, Disabled and Killed in action personnel.[36] In addition to these, the Paramilitary Forces provide their female personnel with separate infrastructure and medical facilities, special care and day-care centres for pregnant women and their children, and consider same station posting to married personnel in most cases.[37] There also exist strict guidelines in terms of the procedures of recruitment, career progression and safety of uniformed personnel through the execution of gender-inclusive HR policies.

Indian peacekeeper serving UNMISS. Photo: UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

The Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) provide 26 weeks of maternity leave, with mothers being able to access additional maternity leave up until the child is 6 months old, which can also be transferred to the father. Both parents are further entitled to parental leave while the child is between 6-30 months, are entitled to 5 days of paid leave upon the adoption of a child, and receive benefits with each child born. Personnel with caring responsibilities are entitled to breastfeeding breaks, subsidised maternity/paternity leave, and work schedules that avoid night shifts or overtime. Further, an Awareness Policy adopted by the Ministry of Defence and CAF recognises the needs of pregnant women and single parents and ensures their work schedule is accommodating of their caring responsibilities – such as exemptions from overnight or 24-hour shifts.[38]



Croatian soldier, Storm Battery, 5th Croatian Contingent.
Photo: U.S. Army, Sgt. Timothy Hamlin, 2020

The Czech Armed Forces (CAF) provide up to 37 weeks of parental leave, transferable between parents who can access leave up until their child is 4 years old. Parents also receive a financial bonus after childbirth. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CAF introduced paid leave for mothers and single fathers to care for young children while schools were closed. There are flexible arrangements for a wide category of caring responsibilities (including caring for elderly and the sick) and situations under which care is required (including bereavement, divorce/single parenting, childcare). There also are day care arrangements for children of personnel working at the ministry of defence and military installations.[39]

Moroccan Police and Military are developing prevention and support measures for uniformed personnel's mental health before, during and after peacekeeping deployments.[40] During the pre-deployment stage, one of the aims is to determine family or professional stressors. This is important in identifying any burden of care that can impact personnel performance during deployment.

ADF personnel in Afghanistan. Photo: Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2023

The Uruguay Armed Force (UAF) has taken steps to implement a 2017 law that enjoins public and private institutions to establish lactation rooms and has since established lactation rooms for personnel.[41] The UAF also has 14 weeks and ten days of paid maternity and paternity leave, respectively.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has flexible maternity and parental leave arrangements that can extend up to 66 weeks when personnel become parents, adopt a child or gain permanent care of a child.[42] The ADF has four categories to support families of staff: mobility and absence from home support, critical incident support, command advice, and transition support.[43] Some specifics include educational support for children, childcare services, the Partner Employment Assistance Programme, and support for family members with special needs, among others.

Ghanaian battalion serving MONUSCO (GHANBATT 13). Photo: MONUSCO/Michael Ali 2017

Both the Nigeria Police Force (NPF)[44] and the **Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN)**[45] have adopted gender policies to strengthen commitments to gender equality in peace and security. The NPF gender policy takes account of several gender discriminatory laws against women who become carers and aims to promote "parenting as the core value of the NPF". Similarly, AFN's gender policy provides four weeks of paid paternity leave for personnel.[46]

The Ghana Police Service (GPS)[47] has adopted a gender policy to mainstream gender equality norms in its activities. **The Ghana Armed Forces (GAF)** processes are underway to adopt a gender policy that provides 2 weeks paternity leave to enable men to share parental responsibilities.

Mongolian Armed Forces (MAF) are introducing measures to support the mental health and well-being of peacekeepers, including increased appointments of psychological and welfare officers in missions, pre-deployment training to support mental health and stress management, social activities to enhance morale, and post-deployment evaluations and services. The MAF also recognise the impact of deployment on families and have announced the intention to establish a pilot project to support the mental health of peacekeepers and their families.[48]

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Analysis of these best practice examples suggests that common factors facilitate improved support of personnel with caring responsibilities in security institutions. These factors include: a clear and enabling policy framework; strong and vocal senior leadership; adequate, predictable and sustained resourcing; and a high level of awareness of the importance of supporting personnel with caring responsibilities. Examples above highlight the importance of identifying and addressing barriers to engagement, promotion and deployment of people with caring responsibilities. Examples above also highlight the importance of, for example, gender- and care-responsive human resource policies and infrastructure. Examples include the provision (and uptake) of adequate care and parental leave, education support for children, care facilities (such as day-care centres and private lactation rooms), breastfeeding breaks, partner employment assistance and same postings for partners, family counselling and welfare services, work-from-home policies and flexible work arrangements, robust anti-discrimination policies and effective disciplinary procedures, mobility and absence from home support, transition support, support for family members with special needs, and exemptions for pregnant women and single parents to perform duties which require 24 hours service or night shifts. Evidence suggests that these forms of support for personnel with caring responsibilities can support the recruitment, retention, promotion and deployment of carers, particularly women, given the gendered nature of care work.[49]

UNMISS peacekeepers from Mongolia, India and Namibia. Photo: UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

Some of the factors that adversely impact women with caring responsibilities in the security sector relate to the disproportionate burden of care often carried by 50 and normative assumptions about who does peace work and who does care work. Some of these factors can be addressed if the uptake of paternity leave and support for men with caring responsibilities improved. There is evidence that strong organisational support and encouragement affect whether or not men use parental leave.[51] Without organisational support, parental leave tends to be low among men due to barriers relating to income level at which it is paid, organisational stigma and traditional gender norms.[52] In organisations where career progression is tied to expectations about the need to work long hours and continuous service prevail, men are less likely to take extended parental leave or flexible working hours to share domestic care work.[53] However, traditional gender norms that shape organisational cultures around male parental leave change when fathers see their male colleagues and fathers in leadership role taking parental leave.[54]

The normalisation of fathers' parental leave is further enhanced when there are leave quotas for fathers and are incentivised to use them.[55] In the Canadian province of Quebec where there is 5 weeks of leave reserved for fathers, Ankita Patnaik reports a 250 percent increase in participation in parental leave among fathers.[56] Another study on the same programme finds that "Quebec mothers exposed to the policy are 5 percentage points more likely to participate in the labour force and to work full time, 5 percentage points less likely to work part time, and 4 percentage points less likely to be unemployed than they would have been in the absence of the policy".[57]

MONUSCO peacekeepers from South Africa. Photo: MONUSCO/Michael Ali 2018

Ultimately, positive workplace culture, support by colleagues and supervisors/senior leadership and gender practices in organisations enable implementation of support for carers.[58] Additionally, high levels of awareness of the need to support carers is essential in changing organisational cultures that stigmatise fathers who take extended leave to share care work.

Another key enabling factor is availability of predictable and sustained resourcing given that the gender pay gap has a determinate effect on family decision on who takes (extended) leave between men and women to assume unpaid domestic care work.[59] Given the evidence that women on average earn less than men, family incomes are less impacted when they take extended leave when they become parents.[60] The policy implication is that when organisations pay at, or close to, wage replacement rates, men increase their contribution to unpaid domestic care, which overtime changes gender norms around paid and unpaid work.[61]

Indeed, the gender pay gap may not be as pertinent to the security sector because salaries are based on rank and time in rank, irrespective of gender. However, one study in 2019 reported gender pay differences among academic surgeons in US military medicine.[62] A 2024 study on academic paediatricians in leadership positions in the US military found no gender pay gap.[63] However, motherhood and maternity leave were cited as the key barrier to career success among women in leadership positions in the security sector.[64] Pregnancy and postpartum are considered by male personnel to render some women ineligible for certain jobs, duties or specific locations for military assignments, arising from a perception that "women may be unable to execute 'perfect' work-life balance during pregnancy, maternity leave, and early childhood parenting".[65] Thus, even when pay and benefits equity exist at the policy level, differences in lived experiences between carers and non-carers have negative long term effects on carers' careers without institutional support. Institutional support is critical given the evidence: in the security sector, "supportive management of personnel—supervisory support, organisational support and work-life balance" or the lack thereof correlates positively with turnover intentions. This evidence suggests that personnel are likely to leave without support to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Recommendations

Building sustainable, equitable, and just peace largely depends on utilising diverse skillset and knowledge of various actors. Such diversity is essential for security institutions to meet the broad and unique demands and needs of people in environments affected by armed conflicts and other crises. For security institutions to attract and maintain such diversity, they must care for staff to extend care as a practice of building and sustaining peace. COVID-19 has heightened attentiveness to issues of care and the importance of care in sustaining life.[67] This increased awareness has brought to the fore ways that security sector organisations and peace operations can better support personnel with caring responsibilities:[68]

- **Technology:** Invest in and utilise technological developments and digitalisation, including to support flexible and remote work, outreach, retention and re-engagement (e.g. after paternal leave or career breaks).
- **Human Resource Management (HRM):** Review HRM policies and practices to support flexible work, part-time work, and job share, where feasible; to ensure adequate parental leave and equal maternal and paternal leave (to help contribute to a more equitable division of care labour); to introduce promotion opportunities that are not dependent on deployments or careers without breaks.

UNMISS peacekeepers from Mongola, India and Namibia. Photo: UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

- **Outreach:** Develop and implement recruitment, retention, deployment and re-engagement drives that target women and people with caring responsibilities.
- **Training:** Train human resource (HR) personnel and managers on the importance of supporting staff with caring responsibilities and the challenges carers face (and consequences for security institutions and peace operations); schedule training at times (and places) where staff with primary or sole caring responsibilities can attend (e.g. by avoiding overnight / evening training or providing carer facilities), where feasible.
- **Deployments:** Consider variations in posting/deployment length and location, and joint posting/deployment with partners, where feasible, for those with caring responsibilities.
- **Institutional Carer Assessments and Strategies:** Map the needs of staff with caring responsibilities; develop strategies to address those needs and ensure carers are treated fairly across the institution and in operations/missions; create monitoring and evaluation framework to assess implementation of those strategies.[69]
- **Diversity and Inclusion Policies:** review diversity and inclusion policies and strategies to ensure the specific needs of carers are included.
- **Disciplinary Procedures:** Codes of conduct should refer to a zero-tolerance policy for any forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination and discrimination on the grounds of parental status or other caring responsibilities. Codes of conduct should refer to measures that will be taken in the event of non-compliance. This should be communicated widely and disciplinary action taken for non-compliance.
- **Support Structures:** Provide or subsidise costs for child care facilities and provide safe spaces for nursing parents; invest collectively in building gender-inclusive infrastructure facilities at national training centres and UNDPO mission bases; create and facilitate mechanisms to support people with caring responsibilities as well as future returning carers, to include mentoring schemes, role models, peer support networks, and information and advice hubs.[70]
- **Gender Sensitivity Training Programs:** Conduction of Gender Sensitivity Training workshops for both male and female security personnel to prevent sexual harassment and abolish sex stereotypes on ground duties.
- **Redressal Committees:** Set up Redressal Committees consisting of female officers by individual T/PCCs and within the UNDPO subsidiary branches to register complaints and receive feedback from personnel returning from missions.

Notes

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2. Team Members include: Dr Eleanor Gordon (Project Lead), Monash University; Professor Katrina Lee-Koo, Monash University / University of Queensland; Dr Richard Fosu, Monash University; Lauren Lowe, Monash University; Joana Osei-Tutu, Deputy Director Women, Youth, Peace and Security Institute, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre / Monash University (Global Consultant); Jane Townsley, Executive Director, International Association of Women Police (Global Consultant); Dr Irine Hiraswari Gayatri, Cluster Research on Foreign Policy and International Issues, Research Centre for Politics, BRIN (Indonesia Consultant); Anushka Chavan (India Consultant); WGCDR Llani Kennealy (Retd), MA (Global Consultant); Jennifer Grover (Global Consultant); Council for Strategic and Defence Research (CSDR) (India Consultant / Partner).
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