

7. MONITORING THE PROGRESS OF BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES, POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND FUNDING

Policies, programmes, and funding to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding are critical for enabling women to breastfeed as long as they want to. To be effective, these country-level policies, programmes, and funding should be monitored to track progress. Quality routine monitoring and data collection on early, exclusive, and continued breastfeeding helps countries assess progress on breastfeeding practices. Monitoring also allows countries to identify gaps and prioritize actions to accelerate the achievement of national and global targets.



Led by UNICEF and WHO, the Global Breastfeeding Collective (the Collective) is a partnership of more than 20 international organizations with the goal of increasing investment and policy change to support breastfeeding worldwide, which requires advocacy at the global, national, and sub-national levels.

Developed by the Collective, this document is one of seven briefs that provide guidance and resources to stakeholders on how to advocate for adoption of these policy actions with government ministries, health care workers and managers, employers, donors, and other key decision-makers.

**GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING
COLLECTIVE**



THE PROBLEM

Most countries do not adequately monitor breastfeeding rates, policies, programmes, and funding.

Only 40 per cent of countries have data on exclusive breastfeeding from the last five years, and there are currently no global indicators to measure the coverage of breastfeeding counselling interventions. Most countries are not able to track funding for breastfeeding programmes or identify how much of the national budget is allocated to support breastfeeding interventions.

THE SOLUTION

Countries should monitor breastfeeding rates, programmes, policies, and funding for breastfeeding interventions at least once every 5 years.

Routine monitoring of breastfeeding practices, programmes, policies, and funding at least once every five years is critical to understanding if progress is being made to reach global and national targets. Better data collection of breastfeeding indicators is essential for countries to assess progress on breastfeeding. Without routinely collected, quality breastfeeding data, countries lack the ability to comprehensively monitor their progress. In addition to tracking rates of early, exclusive, and continued breastfeeding, data on policies and programmes such as counselling interventions and paid family leave, should be routinely collected and monitored at least once every five years.

Information on current breastfeeding practices, policies, and programmes is available in various data sources. Household surveys, such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys, provide national and sub-national level estimates of breastfeeding practices. Collecting sub-national data is also important for programme planning. For facilities providing maternity and newborn services, data reported through a routine

health management information systems can be used to track service provision and breastfeeding outcomes at the facility, district, provincial, or national level.

Some countries have participated in national programmatic self-assessment processes, such as the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), in which key informants report on their implementation of the recommendations of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.¹ An analysis of 22 countries in Asia, Africa and the Latin America and Caribbean revealed that the WBTi score is predictive of increases in exclusive breastfeeding and is a valid tool to measure policy and programme inputs.² Regardless of data source, it is critical to dedicate funding for monitoring programmes and services in order to track progress.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ADVOCACY FOR MONITORING BREASTFEEDING POLICIES, PROGRAMMES, PRACTICES AND FUNDING

On tracking breastfeeding funding to achieve World Health Assembly targets:

[IBFAN's World Breastfeeding Costing Initiative \(WBCi\) Financial Planning Tool](#)

This tool can help countries plan and prioritize actions and budget for these actions accurately. International agencies and donors can also use the tool to calculate or track investments in breastfeeding.

[The WHO guidance on "Budgeting for Health"](#)

This outlines the overall budget process and discusses the specific role of ministry of health within it, and other health sector stakeholders.

On monitoring progress towards national breastfeeding policies and programmes to track performance and bridge gaps:

[WHO's Infant and Young Child Feeding Indicator Handbook](#)

This handbook presents international standard indicators that can be used to assess infant and young child feeding at the household level.

[IBFAN's WBTi Guide Book](#)

This guide describes the tools and processes necessary to organize country-level assessment work, in addition to scoring and color-coding progress and achievements, and use of this tool is monitored by the Collective as part of the Global Breastfeeding Scorecard.

[WHO's Infant and Young Child Feeding: A Tool for Assessing National Practices, Policies, and Programmes](#)

This tool can guide countries in determining strengths and weaknesses in their breastfeeding programmes and policies.

[Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly: A Guide to Global Scale-Up](#)

This tool can help countries assess their current efforts to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.

Additional tools for creating an advocacy strategy:

[UNICEF Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives](#)

This toolkit provides practical tools for country leaders for building and carrying out an advocacy strategy.

[Alive & Thrive Guide for Public Health Advocacy: Tools and Lessons Learned from Successful IYCF Advocacy in Southeast Asia](#)

This guide can be used to develop a nutrition advocacy strategy through a four-step process for policy change.

[Global Breastfeeding Scorecard](#)

This is useful tool to view the status of countries on different indicators.

CONCLUSION

Governments, policy makers and civil society can help ensure that national and global breastfeeding standards are met by strengthening country-level monitoring of breastfeeding practices, policies, programmes, and funding. Better monitoring and reporting systems are key to improving breastfeeding and health outcomes and to giving all children the healthiest start in life.

SOURCES

- ¹ WHO and UNICEF. Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. 2003. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241562218>
- ² Lutter CK and Morrow AL. Protection, Promotion, and Support and Global Trends in Breastfeeding, *Advances in Nutrition*, Volume 4, Issue 2, 1 March 2013, Pages 213–219, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23493537> Accessed 11 April 2026.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

www.k4health.org/toolkits/breastfeeding-advocacy-toolkit to view the Breastfeeding Advocacy Toolkit

and www.unicef.org/breastfeeding for more information about the Global Breastfeeding Collective

Global Breastfeeding Collective Partners: 1000 Days | Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine | Action Against Hunger | Alive and Thrive | Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation | CARE | Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute | Center for Women’s Health and Wellness | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | Concern Worldwide | Helen Keller International | International Baby Food Action Network | International Lactation Consultant Association | La Leche League International | New Partnership for Africa’s Development | Nutrition International | PATH | Save the Children | UNICEF | United States Agency for International Development | WHO | World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action | World Bank | World Vision International

World Health Organization (WHO)
Avenue Appia 20
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
www.who.int/en

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
www.unicef.org

unicef.org/breastfeeding

Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication.
Permissions will be freely granted to educational or non-profit organizations.

© World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2019.
Some rights reserved. This work is available under the [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) license.
© UNICEF/UN0198217/Njiokiktjien: Cover Photo