

3. ENACTING PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND WORKPLACE BREASTFEEDING POLICIES

Far too many mothers are forced to stop breastfeeding before they want to in order to return to work. Breastfeeding and work do not have to be mutually exclusive. Breastfeeding requires a significant time investment from mothers, particularly during the first few months of a child's life. Policies on paid family leave, dedicated breastfeeding spaces, and paid breastfeeding breaks are critical to maintaining family income while allowing mothers the time and space needed to feed their babies.



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

No mother should have to choose between providing for her family economically or offering the best nourishment for her infant.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding for two years or beyond to give children and mothers the full benefits of breastfeeding. Yet, only 41 per cent of infants worldwide are exclusively breastfed for six months.² A mother's return to work is a critical barrier to applying recommended breastfeeding practices. Mothers need time off from work to care for a new baby and get breastfeeding off to a successful start. When a breastfeeding mother returns to work, her ability to continue breastfeeding depends on having breastfeeding breaks; a safe, private, and hygienic space for expressing and storing breastmilk; and access to affordable child care near her workplace.

THE SOLUTION

Expanding family leave protections can reduce child mortality and improve health and economic outcomes.

Women are two and a half times more likely to breastfeed when her decision to do so is protected, promoted, and supported.¹ Data from approximately 300,000 live births in 20 low- and middle-income countries make it clear that longer maternity leave is associated with lower infant mortality. For each month of additional maternity protection, there is a reduction of nearly eight infant deaths per 1,000 live births.³ When mothers are provided with time, space, and support to breastfeed in line with recommendations:

- **Children have the healthiest possible start in life and grow to be stronger, smarter, and more productive later during adulthood;**
- **Mothers' mental and physical health improves, benefitting them and their employers;^{4,5,6,7}**
- **Healthcare expenditures decline.^{10,11}**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) recommends that employers provide a minimum of 18 weeks of maternity leave, and many countries have adopted maternity protection of six months or longer partly to enable six months of exclusive breastfeeding. Continued breastfeeding through 24 months and beyond can then be supported through workplace provision of safe and hygienic lactation spaces, breastfeeding breaks, and childcare support. Policies that promote flexible and family-friendly workplaces attract more women to the workforce and reduce constraints on women's time, increasing per capita income, and benefiting national economies.¹² When women can simultaneously nurture their children and participate in paid work, everyone benefits.

Women in informal employment (who lack maternity leave and other accommodations) can benefit from state grants and other social and financial protection measures to help their families maintain a steady income while they feed and care for their baby.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ADVOCACY FOR PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND WORKPLACE BREASTFEEDING POLICIES

On providing paid family leave to all mothers, including women in the informal economy:

[ILO Database](#)

This resource provides country-by-country maternity protection laws around the world.

[Social Protection for All Issue Brief: Maternity cash benefits for workers in the informal economy](#)

This brief provides information about how to provide support to working mothers in the informal economy.

[WABA Maternity Protection Chart](#)

This resource provides data from all countries on maternity and paternity leave.

On establishing breastfeeding-friendly work places, including establishing support facilities such as crèches, breastfeeding rooms, and flexible work hours:

[Alive & Thrive Workplace Lactation Support Toolkit](#)

This set of tools provides guidance on implementing workplace lactation support.

[Let's Make it Work!: Breastfeeding in the Workplace](#)

This report outlines how to make breastfeeding possible for working mothers.

[The ILO Maternity Protection Resource Package](#)

This package of information and tools can guide breastfeeding support advocacy at all levels.

[Business Case for Breastfeeding](#)

This comprehensive program provides resources to educate employers on supporting breastfeeding employees in the workplace.

[Alliance for Breastfeeding Action \(WABA\) Brief](#)

This brief offers examples of how to support working mothers and advocate for maternity protection.

[UNICEF Breastfeeding for Working Mothers video](#)

This video demonstrates how to express breast milk and keep it safe.

On ensuring that breastfeeding and maternity protection are prioritized in public spending:

[The World Breastfeeding Costing Initiative: The need to invest in babies](#)

This report provides evidence and strategies to advocate for improving BFHI investments.

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 tool reviews national progress in implementing key breastfeeding interventions to encourage countries to support breastfeeding.

CONCLUSION

Political leaders and employers can improve economic and health outcomes by expanding paid family leave. Advocating for parental leave is advocating for children to have the healthiest possible start to life and to grow up to be stronger, smarter, and more productive. Together, we can ensure all mothers and families have the support they need for optimal health and productivity.

SOURCES

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- ¹¹ Ball T.M. & Wright, A.L., *Pediatrics* “Health care costs of formula feeding in the first year of life,” 1999.
- ¹² Asian Development Bank. (2015). *Women in the workforce: An unmet potential in Asia and the Pacific.* Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank.

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

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