

## WABA statement on International Labour Day

1 May 2015



World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action

### WABA Celebrates International Labour Day 2015

"The future of work must also deal with the future of women at work... Could we not design maternity protection and work-family policies that are more inclusive, and supportive of gender equality?"

- Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General

Labour rights are women's rights too! On the occasion of the International Labour Day 2015, WABA restates the importance of upholding the rights of women workers. In the year 2000, Convention 183 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) called for a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave. This has been ratified to date by only 29 countries. This convention, together with its corresponding Recommendation 191, also called for breastfeeding breaks and a safe working environment for women.

**Women  
are  
equally  
important**



#### Women's Representation in the Labour Force

In 2013, the male employment-to-population ratio stood at 72.2%, while the ratio for females was 47.1%. Women are more likely to work in informal employment and unpaid care work.

#### Gender Pay Gap

Globally, women are paid less than men. In most countries, women earn an average of only 60% to 75% of men's wages.

#### Maternity Protection

Only 51% of countries offer 14 weeks or more maternity leave. This does not make it possible for working mothers to breastfeed exclusively for at least 6 months - a recommendation by WHO/UNICEF for optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices. Additionally, 41% of all women still do not have adequate maternity protection.

## Maternity Protection

That breastfeeding contributes greatly to maternal and child health is incontrovertible. Breastfeeding helps prevent disease and promotes optimum growth and development. It even reduces environmental threats caused by the production of formula milk.

When a woman chooses to become a mother, she has a right to do what's best for her child. A mother should be supported to balance her productive and reproductive work without having to sacrifice one for the other. However, working women who are either pregnant or breastfeeding face an increased risk of discrimination at the workplace, often over and above the problem of gender-based discrimination.

Creating an ideal socio-economic environment to enable working women to breastfeed addresses gender inequality. Therefore, work policies that allow both women and men to successfully combine work with maternity, paternity and care responsibilities are needed.

ILO conventions such as the Equal Remuneration Convention C100 (1951) and Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention C156 (1981) emphasise the importance of gender equality and non-discrimination in both paid and care work. To achieve equality, it is vital that fathers are involved in child-rearing, as this acknowledges (1) men's right to parenthood and (2) their responsibility to share unpaid care/household work. Evidence also indicates that this involvement is key in ensuring a child's future success, and is beneficial to societies and businesses. This is echoed in the global Lean In initiative, which claims that "Fathers who participate in caregiving are more patient, empathetic, and flexible and enjoy greater job satisfaction."

These issues are crucial considerations in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and make Maternity Protection and work-family balance key in achieving global development goals, such as reducing poverty, increasing health standards and promoting gender equality.

The following documents are the basis of any campaign on Maternity Protection:



[Convention 183 + Recommendation 191 \(2000\)](#)

These documents call for provisions relating to:

- maternity leave
- job security
- breastfeeding-friendly workplaces
- breastfeeding breaks
- safe and healthy work environments



[Maternity + Paternity at Work - Law and Practice across the World \(2014\)](#)

This document provides information relating to:

- parental leave
- country cases
- analyses of different ILO's conventions

## Country Cases

Click on the pins below for examples of Maternity Protection practices in Botswana, Paraguay, Sweden, the United States of America and Vietnam.



## Call for action

The World Breastfeeding Week 2015 theme is on working women and breastfeeding. Through this and other related campaigns, WABA engages with partners at global, regional and national levels to empower and support all women, working in both the formal and informal sectors, to adequately combine work with child-rearing, particularly breastfeeding. To achieve this, it is important that the ILO continues to promote and support Maternity Protection campaigns at both the global and national levels.

### WABA calls for all parties to:

- GALVANISE multi-dimensional support from all sectors to enable women everywhere to work and breastfeed
- PROMOTE action by employers to become family-, parent-, baby-, and mother-friendly
- INFORM people about the latest in global Maternity Protection entitlements
- STRENGTHEN, facilitate and showcase supportive practices that enable women working in informal sectors to breastfeed
- ENGAGE with target groups to protect the breastfeeding rights of women in the workplace

"Women's ability to decide to breastfeed and to practice it optimally is increasingly affected by globalisation...and greater maternal participation in labour markets through paid employment without workplace accommodation for the maternal role of women."

- Julie Smith (2015)

For more information, please contact:

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References:

1. [Women and the Economy Infographic](#)
2. [Tips for Men at Home](#)
3. [R191 - Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 \(No. 191\)](#)
4. [C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No. 183\)](#)
5. [Maternity and Paternity at Work - Law and Practice Across the World](#)
6. Smith, J. P. (2015). [Markets, Breastfeeding and Trade in Mothers' Milk](#). International Breastfeeding Journal, 10(1), 9.
7. [Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment](#)
8. [Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation](#)
9. [Causes of child mortality infographic](#)
10. [Maternal Mortality Fact-sheet](#)



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**World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)** is a global network of individuals & organisations concerned with the protection, promotion & support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA action is based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the Global Strategy for Infant & Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF & an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

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