



ILCA and WABA Statement for the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW63)

The [International Lactation Consultant Association \(ILCA\)](#) and the [World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action \(WABA\)](#) issue this joint statement on the occasion of the **2019 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63)**. The CSW63 theme: **“social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”** highlights the critical intersection between advancing women’s economic equality and supporting women’s work as mothers and family caregivers. Breastfeeding is one aspect of caregiving that requires measures such as social protection coverage, access to support through public services and sustainable infrastructure particularly in the context of women’s work. The provision of these measures promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with long-term benefits for society at large.

ILCA represents more than 5000 skilled lactation professionals in 90 countries worldwide who provide direct clinical care and support to breastfeeding families. WABA with over 200 organisational endorsers worldwide promotes, protects and supports breastfeeding through programs such as [World Breastfeeding Week](#), [Warm Chain](#) and the [Empowering Parents Campaign](#). ILCA and WABA, with the undersigned partner organisations, believe that women’s economic empowerment is inextricably linked to their role as mothers and primary caregivers. Therefore, the purpose of this statement is to call upon governments, trade unions, employers and civil society **to urgently seek collaborative action to enact paid family leave and family-friendly workplace policies according to the minimum global standards outlined by the International Labor Organization (ILO)**.

The 2017 ILO publication [“Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men”](#) reported that among parents globally, almost 90% of fathers are employed while only 47% of mothers are employed despite that 70% of women prefer to work as well. The same report indicated that among almost 150,000 participants from 142 countries the “balance between work and family” was cited as the top challenge to achieving gender equality in the workplace. Further, ILO also reports that [830 million women workers](#) are not adequately protected with 80% of these women in Africa and Asia. Another [ILO report \(2017\)](#) highlights the urgent need for universal social protection in terms of maternity benefits.

Much of the work that women do is unpaid care work. The ILO reported that women provide 3 times the unpaid care work for children and elders compared to men. This [unpaid care work](#) can be quantified as 9% of the GDP or 11 trillion USD. Unpaid care work restricts mothers from participating in the workforce and from receiving the associated employment benefits. The lack of adequate support for breastfeeding women in the context of work is also a barrier to women achieving the optimal recommendations for exclusive and continued breastfeeding. Globally, only 41% of children are breastfed exclusively for the first six months of life, a long way from the 2030 global target of 70%. A robust body of research supports the importance of breastfeeding for the health and well-being of women and children across the life-cycle. Current evidence demonstrates that optimal breastfeeding is also associated with higher educational attainment and subsequent economic productivity throughout the lifespan. This is of particular relevance to women and girls who often face discrimination at work and the subsequent lack of economic empowerment.

Addressing the existing imbalance between work and family requires the implementation of standards according to the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No.183\)](#) and associated [Recommendations \(R191\)](#). These standards are:

- At least 14 weeks leave around childbirth
- Health protection at the workplace for pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Cash and medical benefits
- Employment protection and nondiscrimination
- Breastfeeding support after the return to work

Despite these standards, according to the WHO/UNICEF 2018 [Global Breastfeeding Scorecard](#) only 12% of countries provide the recommended 18 weeks of paid leave and workplace support (as per ILO Recommendation 191). Enacting paid parental leave and breastfeeding workplace policies is a priority in the [Call to Action](#) of the [Global Breastfeeding Collective](#), a partnership co-led by UNICEF and WHO comprised of over 20 partners, of which ILCA and WABA are actively engaged.

Several other international conventions and instruments also support the critical importance of government policies and programmes that support breastfeeding parents. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls upon governments to ensure that legislation, incentives and appropriate institutional support systems empower women and parents to balance breastfeeding with the demands of women's labour. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding, the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding also call on governments to take responsibility for enacting policies that enable women to assume their caregiving roles at home, including breastfeeding without compromising their right to decent work.

The International Lactation Consultant Association and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action therefore call upon governments, trade unions, employers and civil society **to enact paid family leave and family-friendly workplace policies according to the minimum global standards outlined by the International Labor Organization (ILO).**

