

WABA International Labour Day Statement
1 May 2019



World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action

Decent work for all working parents
**Let's move the needle on
breastfeeding and gender equality**

A ground-breaking survey [report](#) from the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) provides the first-ever account of global views and experiences of women and men regarding women and work. According to Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General *"This survey clearly shows that most women and men around the globe prefer that women have paid jobs. Family-supportive policies, which enable women to remain and progress in paid employment and encourage men to take their fair share of care work, are crucial to achieving gender equality at work."*

A century has passed since the start of the ILO, but much more needs to be done concertedly to achieve decent work for all workers. Decent work is part of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG 8). Today's global economic and labour conditions are changing rapidly, with some positive but many negative implications on workers' health and livelihoods, as well as that of their children and families. Decent work includes parental social protection (PSP) policies and legislation, public-funded paid leave policies, [legislation](#), parent-friendly or family-friendly workplaces that help transform social norms, protect workers from job discrimination and help achieve the balance in work and family life for all workers. These measures recognise that workers have responsibilities as breadwinners and caregivers, and contribute to achieving a more equitable sharing of care responsibilities, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) on gender equality.

Balancing work and family life, including breastfeeding, is increasingly necessary for all workers. This will ensure a productive and healthy workforce thus leading to a better society. By enabling the integration of workers' productive and reproductive

work and lives, all sectors of society will benefit. Benefits include increased productivity, family income, job security, workers and children's health and well-being, and a nation's socio-economic health and stability.



Breastfeeding is a cost-effective way to increase health, human capital and stimulate economic growth. Scaling up optimal breastfeeding according to the international recommendations could prevent more than 823 000 child and 20 000 maternal deaths each year. Not breastfeeding is associated with lower intelligence and results in economic losses of about \$302 billion annually [1]. Many barriers to optimal breastfeeding exist, one of the largest being lack of support for parents at work. Supporting parents at work is a prerequisite for optimal breastfeeding, distributing care work and transforming social norms.

Research shows that paid maternity leave policies could help reduce infant mortality by 13% for each additional month of maternity leave [2]. Paid leave enables women to physically recover from childbirth before returning to work and benefits their physical, mental and emotional health in the short and long-term. Policies that ensure parental and paternity leave, should not compromise existing [maternity leave](#) benefits or leave availability. Rather, these policies should enable fathers/partners to prioritise family-related responsibilities while meeting work demands. Limited or no paternity leave reduces the time fathers can spend with their families to develop the relationships and patterns that result in gender-equitable parenting. Fathers who are given leave are able to work with mothers and shape a parenting and breastfeeding team. Working as a team empowers parents, enables exclusive breastfeeding, improves father-infant attachment, couple's relationship and infant development.

The ILO tripartite structure comprising of governments, employers and trade unions must work in synergy together with civil society organisations (CSO) to realise the decent work goal for all workers.

- Governments and policymakers should implement global guidance and national policies that promote flexible and family-friendly workplaces to support breastfeeding. They should also ratify and implement key conventions that contribute to the decent work agenda such as the [ILO C183](#) - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 and R191 as the minimum standards, [C156](#) - Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981; [C184](#) - Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001; and [C102](#) - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952.

- Trade unions and CSOs must advocate for workplace support on issues such as breastfeeding facilities, paid breastfeeding breaks, and flexible working arrangements to support breastfeeding.
- Employers must provide supportive workplaces and flexible working arrangements for all workers.

Achieving decent work for workers that encompasses all the demands on parental social protection, including those required for optimal breastfeeding is vital. We must set and implement global standards that will promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment for all as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On Labour Day 2019, WABA and partners call upon all workers and stakeholders to join the **Empowering Parents Campaign** to advocate for **parental social protection** that will enhance workers' rights, breastfeeding, health, and survival and lead to achieving decent work and greater gender equality.



^[1] Rollins, N. C., Bhandari, N., Hajeebhoy, N., Horton, S., Lutter, C. K., Martines, J. C., Piwoz, E. G., Richter, L. M., Victora, C. G. (2016). Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices? *The Lancet*, 387(10017), 491-504

^[2] Nandi, A., Hajizadeh, M., Harper, S., Koski, A., Strumpf, E. C., & Heymann, J. (2016). Increased duration of paid maternity leave lowers infant mortality in low- and middle-income countries: A quasi-experimental study. *PLoS Medicine*, 13(3): e1001985

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals & organisations dedicated to the protection, promotion & support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF 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) 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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