

## Joint Statement for CSW64: Invest in breastfeeding for gender equality and sustainable development

The International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA) and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) have partnered to create the following statement to be delivered to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) with the goal of highlighting the promotion and protection of breastfeeding and skilled lactation care on the world stage. Although the event itself has been scaled back in light of the current concerns regarding coronavirus disease (COVID-19), we hope to elevate the statement at upcoming meetings of the General Assembly. We also welcome you to share the statement widely within your community and with your national leadership.



***"Breastfeeding is the biological norm but it is not yet the social norm. When a mother chooses to breastfeed, every one of us has the responsibility to protect and support her. By doing so we've started a partnership with her. Breastfeeding partnerships matter, a lot! Not just at home with a partner and family but also at work and socially.....when everyone involved learns and positively accepts the challenge to shift breastfeeding to become the social norm." Leah Hughes, Girls Globe***

This year, the global community will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The highlight includes a review of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding are embedded in the [1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)(1), [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\) Maternity Protection Convention C183](#) (2) and [CEDAW](#)(3). Breastfeeding is one of the most effective and cost-effective ways to save and improve the lives of children everywhere, yielding lifelong health benefits for infants and their mothers. Therefore, [breastfeeding](#) is also a key intervention to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Women's reproductive health and rights must be prioritised as a key component of the Sustainable Development Goals. Lactation and breastfeeding are part of the reproductive continuum and require access to consistent information and skilled support. Breastfeeding protects the health of women by reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. [Increased breastfeeding rates](#) could prevent 20,000 maternal deaths each year from breast cancer alone and prevent over 820,000 child deaths each year. Breastfeeding rates are stagnant or declining in many parts of the world. The cost of not breastfeeding on the global scale is about [\\$302 billion annually](#). Although some progress has been made in supporting breastfeeding it is far from being the social norm.

When breastfeeding support is offered to women, the duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding is increased. Characteristics of effective support include: that it is offered as standard by trained personnel during antenatal or postnatal care, that it includes ongoing scheduled visits so that women can predict when support will be available, and that it is tailored to the setting and the needs of the population group. The [Warm Chain](#) places the

mother-baby dyad at the core and follows the first 1,000 days timeline. With consistent messages and proper referral systems throughout the warm chain, the mother-baby dyad will benefit from ongoing support and skilled assistance.

Women's economic empowerment is inextricably linked to their empowerment as mothers and primary infant caregivers. According to the ILO, [830 million women](#) workers do not have adequate maternity protection. When fathers/partners support breastfeeding and are involved in caring for the baby, breastfeeding improves, the parental relationship is better. [Supporting parents at work](#) is a prerequisite for optimal breastfeeding, distributing care work and transforming social norms. Parent-friendly 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 and at home.

Balancing work and family life, including breastfeeding, is increasingly necessary for all. This will ensure a productive and healthy workforce thus leading to a better society. Effective partnerships between governments, employers, trade unions and civil society organisations will increase access to gender-equitable social protection. Gender equitable social protection includes legislation, positive social norms and supportive work policies which are the basis of the [Empowering Parents Campaign](#).

In light of the [Political declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#), the [International Lactation Consultant Association](#) and the [World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action](#), therefore, call upon governments, UN agencies, health systems, workplaces, communities and civil society organisations to

- **Implement gender-equitable social protection that will enable breastfeeding and greater gender equality.**
- **Enact and monitor national legislation and policies that uphold the rights of women and their children in diverse contexts.**
- **Enact paid parental leave and workplace breastfeeding policies for women in the formal and informal economy.**
- **Create a warm chain of support for breastfeeding across healthcare, workplace and community from pregnancy until the child's second birthday.**
- **Invest in interventions such as support for breastfeeding as a means to improve the health and survival of women and children.**

Together we can help create a better world for women and men, girls and boys by supporting breastfeeding to become the social norm. This will benefit all of society.

Endnote

(1) Promote public information on the benefits of breast-feeding; examine ways and means of implementing fully the WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and enable mothers to breastfeed their infants by providing legal, economic, practical and emotional support; feeding for working mothers" (paragraph 106(r); "Eliminate discriminatory practices by employers and take appropriate measures in consideration of women's reproductive role and functions, such as the denial of employment and dismissal due to pregnancy or breast-feeding, or requiring proof of contraceptive use, and take effective measures to ensure that pregnant women, women on maternity leave or women re-entering the labour market after childbearing are not discriminated against;(paragraph 165(c); "Ensure, through legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and to have parental benefits; promote the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, and also promote the facilitation of breast-feeding for working mothers; (paragraph 179(c).

(2) maternity leave; the right to cash and medical benefits; the prohibition of dismissal during maternity leave; and the right to daily breastfeeding breaks during working hours, breastfeeding breaks and facilities in the workplace and maternity leave.

(3) special measures "aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory" (Article 4.2); that women should be afforded, "the right to protection of health and safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction" (Article 11.1f).

@ILCA @UNWomen #CSW64 #Beijing+25 #breastfeeding#WABA#GenerationEquality



World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations dedicated to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). WABA coordinates the annual World Breastfeeding Week campaign.

[www.waba.org.my](http://www.waba.org.my)