

Labour Day 2020: Join us in promoting paid leave and social protection to celebrate workers worldwide!

"Workers and businesses are facing catastrophe, in both developed and developing economies... We have to move fast, decisively, and together. The right, urgent, measures, could make the difference between survival and collapse."

Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General



Supporting breastfeeding through paid leave and social protection for all is a societal imperative. The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening the wellbeing, livelihoods, and economic conditions of millions of workers and their families worldwide. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenge of balancing the competing demands of work and care responsibilities for parents and families. **ILO and UNICEF** have highlighted the need for employers to support working parents/families during this unprecedented time.



While the pandemic has worsened unemployment and caused loss of income for some workers, it has increased work for others, especially for healthcare and other frontliners. About 60% of the global workforce works informally, in sectors rarely covered by normal social protection.

Informal sector workers face even more dire challenges for basic survival and needs. Women workers, who make up most of the health workforce, are more likely to lack social protection, including publicly funded paid leave policies and parent-friendly workplaces. The pandemic has also worsened the effects of long standing gender inequalities and increased the disproportionate burden of care work on women – the lack of social protection is a key barrier to the enabling environment for the life-saving care work of breastfeeding.



Berlina Nugroho © WABA 2008

The importance of breastfeeding for survival, health and wellbeing of both mothers and children is **well established** – not breastfeeding is associated with lower cognitive capacity, and results in about 700,000 deaths and economic losses of about **\$340 billion annually**. As global breastfeeding rates have remained **stagnant**, lack of social and workplace protection remain key barriers to continued breastfeeding. Global progress is also slow in meeting the World Health Organization (WHO) **recommendation** to provide at least 6 months paid leave to support exclusive breastfeeding. Research shows that paid maternity leave policies could help reduce **infant mortality by 13%** for each additional month of maternity leave. In times of pandemics and health emergencies such as COVID-19, breastfeeding helps reduce mortality rates and build lifelong immunity for children. Another **research study** in 38 low and middle income countries also showed that paid leave policies improved exclusive breastfeeding rates. Women who are not supported to breastfeed resort to feeding the child with breastmilk substitutes (BMS), a practice which has health risks and adds to the household's economic burden.



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In 2000, the ILO adopted the **C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000** and the **Recommendation (R191)**, which define the minimum global standards for maternity leave as 14 and 18 weeks, respectively. R191 also recommends parental leave after the expiry of maternity leave. The **WABA Parents At Work (PAW) Advocacy tool** shows that to date, only 38 countries have ratified the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). Although most countries offer at least some paid maternity leave, policies are typically insufficient and uptake may be low. Out of 195 countries studied, only 100 offer paternity leave and only 66 offer parental leave.



Her Excellency Hajija Aisha Ummi Garba El'Rufai, First Lady of Kaduna State in Nigeria, advocating on maternity issues in Nigeria. #LeaveSavesLives Campaign

Family-supportive policies, which enable women to remain and progress in paid employment and encourage men to do their fair share of care work, are crucial to achieving gender equality at work and at home.



Paid parental/family leave has the power to contribute significantly to the recognition and redistribution of care work and to reduce inequalities between men and women. When men/partners support breastfeeding and have responsive relationships with their infants, breastfeeding practices improve.

An **enabling environment** for breastfeeding is created when interventions are available at structural, setting and individual levels. Examples of interventions include implementation, monitoring and enforcement of the **International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes** and relevant World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions, mass media, and social mobilisation, such as the WABA **World Breastfeeding Week** Campaign and the **Alive & Thrive #LeaveSavesLives Campaign in Nigeria**. In both the formal and informal work sectors, gender-equitable **parental social protection** which includes measures such as paid leave and **workplace support** is essential. Investment in a **warm chain of support**, across the health, workplace and community levels is urgently needed.



By working together across sectors to support parents/families to balance their paid work and care responsibilities, we can strengthen the ability of all workers to withstand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding in the context of work and the ongoing emergency will save lives, improve health and wellbeing as well as generate cost savings for families and nations. On this Labour Day 2020, join WABA and Alive & Thrive to advocate and mobilise for increased:

- Investment in national-level social protection coverage and entitlements, including publicly funded paid parental/family leave and workplace support.
- Awareness amongst employers and trade unions in all sectors to ensure provision and uptake of parent-friendly work policies as well as prevent against discrimination at work.
- Consistency across sectors in information and communication strategies related to supporting breastfeeding among working parents/families.

#LeaveSavesLivesCampaign
#WABA #AliveandThrive #Breastfeeding #ILOFutureofWork #MaternityProtection
#EmpoweringParentsCampaign #WarmChain #PaidFamilyLeave #WBW2020 #ILO
#MayDay #LabourDay @GuyRyder @ilo #COVID19

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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

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