

# TRADE UNIONS

are key actors in advocating, negotiating and implementing social protection and breastfeeding rights for all parents at the workplace. Trade unions have the power to organise, inform, mobilise workers and negotiate for collective bargaining agreements that support breastfeeding.

## BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

Breastfeeding matters because it is a low-cost way of providing the best nutrition for the baby. It protects the baby against common illnesses both in the short and long-term. It reduces the risk of cancer and other conditions in the mother. The cost of not breastfeeding is huge for families and nations. Breastfeeding is also a climate-smart decision and key to the Sustainable Development Goals.

WHO and UNICEF recommend:

- ▶ Early initiation of breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth.
- ▶ Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life.
- ▶ Continued breastfeeding up to 2 years of age or beyond, with the introduction of nutritionally adequate and safe complementary (solid) foods at 6 months.



**WARM CHAIN OF SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING:** The Warm Chain places the mother-baby dyad at the core and follows the first 1,000 days timeline. It strives to link different actors by coordinating efforts at all levels to provide a continuum of care. Each actor or link in the Warm Chain may already be part of an existing initiative such as the BFHI or a community health programme. With consistent messages and proper referral systems throughout the warm chain, the mother-baby dyad will benefit from ongoing support and breastfeeding counselling. All mothers are then empowered with a more satisfying and effective breastfeeding experience. A warm chain of support will help build an enabling environment for breastfeeding and protect against industry influence.

# TRADE UNIONS can support breastfeeding in many ways:

1. Ensure that pregnant and nursing workers' health, maternity, paternity and parental rights are given priority in the union and workplace.
2. Develop and review parental social protection policies at work and advocate to governments for implementation and strengthening of policies in line with the minimum ILO standards such as C183, R191, C156 and others.
3. Negotiate collective bargaining agreements on paid leave, health and safety, medical assistance, job security and protection from discrimination, suitable facilities as well as breastfeeding breaks when returning to work, among others.
4. Ensure the implementation of parental social protection policies and programmes at the workplace and elsewhere.
5. Disseminate information widely, educate workers and train union representatives on parental social protection, breastfeeding issues and rights.
6. Connect with networks and allies at the national and global levels to ensure breastfeeding rights are included as a key element of the universal social protection campaign.
7. Watch out for misleading marketing and donations of breastmilk substitutes, bottles or teats. This is not allowed according to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Inform relevant authorities if you see such violations.
8. How else can YOU protect, promote and support breastfeeding?  
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**World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)**



This card was developed in collaboration with  
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) & ITUC-AP.

