



World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action

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## International Labour Day Statement

1 May 2021

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# Supporting breastfeeding families in the workforce

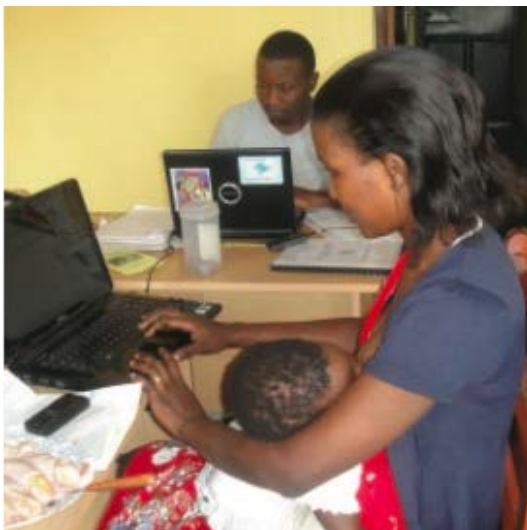


The situation for new parents who are still learning and adapting to accommodate the needs of their newborns including breastfeeding is very challenging with the added fear of protecting their babies from COVID-19 infection. Gender inequality, with women already

performing [three times more unpaid care work](#) in addition to their paid work than men, has exacerbated during COVID-19 and impacted on the work-life balance. There is an urgent need to establish and expand parental social protection to support breastfeeding, redistribute the unpaid care work between parents and contribute to greater gender equality.

Physical distancing and movement restrictions have helped to control the spread of the virus. Employees are required to work from home and those unable to work for home could be given leave. Telework is an opportunity for some families with newborns to have time and support to breastfeed on demand while still participating in paid work. At the same time, workers on the frontline face increased workload and health risks and challenges in carrying out their parental responsibilities including child care and breastfeeding.

Going back to work is often cited as the number one reason for cessation of breastfeeding due to inadequate time, space, and support. It is concerning that over [800 million women workers](#) are currently not supported by public paid maternity and parental social protection. This figure does not even include women working in the informal economy that accounts for [over 60 percent of the global workforce](#). Workers need maternity and parental protection to ensure they can perform their parental duties including breastfeeding and also to avoid discrimination against them at the workplace.



National policies and programmes should emphasise the need for workers working in both the formal and informal sectors to have access to paid maternity, paternity and parental leave as [per ILO recommendations](#). Workers should be provided a minimum of 18 weeks and preferably up to six months of paid maternity leave. Only [39 countries](#) have ratified the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and as of 2016 only [42](#) percent of countries out of 184 with available data met the minimum standards set out in the ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183. The availability of [parental social protection differs in each country](#) and gives way to inequalities among parents. The private sector can sometimes go beyond the nationally mandated in providing social protection for its employees. Work policies should also ensure that [parental and paternity leave](#) does not compromise existing maternity leave benefits. These policies should enable

fathers/partners to prioritise family-related responsibilities and work with their partners to shape a parenting and [breastfeeding team](#), while meeting work demands.

Social dialogue including collective bargaining by the tripartite composed of trade unions, employers and government need to demand for public-funded paid leave policies, parent-friendly workplace policies, breastfeeding space/breastmilk expressing facilities, paid breastfeeding breaks and flexible working arrangements to support breastfeeding. Improving the coverage and quality of worksite-based breastfeeding support provisions including lactation rooms and breaks during the workday are also essential. Trade unions should ensure that the informal sector workers are represented during policy discussions on social protection.

In times of pandemics and health emergencies such as COVID-19, employers need to provide [targeted support and interventions](#) to accommodate the varying needs of breastfeeding parents. The whole of society not only needs to react urgently to the current issues affecting working parents but also preempt solutions to possible future issues that may arise from both the pandemic and the changing norms of work life such as teleworking and digitalisation.



WABA's [Empowering Parents Campaign](#) promotes social protection that will facilitate the integration of parents' productive and reproductive work in both formal and informal settings. This will ensure breastfeeding parents rights to parental social protection legislation, supportive workplace policies and positive attitudinal change. Supporting breastfeeding is essential in achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). This labour day, WABA calls upon governments, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations and communities to protect and support breastfeeding families in the workforce by:

- working with governments and employers to review and [improve national laws](#) that cover maternity and parental social protection for [all workers](#).
- implementing [maternity and parental social protection legislation](#) and workplace breastfeeding support in both the [formal and informal work sectors](#).
- engaging with [various stakeholders](#) on implementing [breastfeeding friendly workplaces](#) that provide [workplace support](#) such as breastfeeding facilities, paid breastfeeding breaks, and flexible working arrangements.
- advocating for [public funded paid parental leave](#) that enables exclusive breastfeeding and that [promotes involvement of fathers/partners](#) in childcare and

domestic work.

- developing, implementing and monitoring relevant policies to include informal workers in maternity and social protection arrangements.

For more information, contact:

Thinagaran Letchimanan, [thina@waba.org.my](mailto:thina@waba.org.my)



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)



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