

WABA International  
Labour Day Statement  
1 May 2022



World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action

## Supporting breastfeeding at work: Improve parental social protection now!

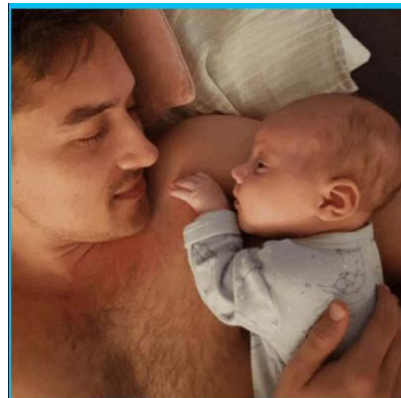


The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects women and low-paid workers, **broadening gender inequalities** in the workforce. Significant disruption to the health system has resulted in a lack of access to maternal services including antenatal and postnatal care. The crisis has also increased the burden on women, with a high risk of unemployment and additional household and family responsibilities. Furthermore, maternity protection has not been prioritised on the **agenda of the COVID-19 relief packages**. Parents need parental social protection that can ensure income security, prevent discrimination, allow access to healthcare and enable breastfeeding for the recommended duration. Parenting norms can be transformed to ensure fathers or partners share childcare and domestic responsibilities equitably to reduce the gender gap.

To date, only **41 countries have ratified** the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). Although almost all the countries have adopted statutory provisions for maternity leave in their legislations, there are variations across different countries and only **52 countries meet or exceed the**

**ILO 18-week standard.** The provisions in some countries are not adequate for new parents to combine productive and reproductive work including breastfeeding. ILO estimates that 649 million women do not have adequate maternity leave and at the current pace, it will take at least 46 years to achieve minimum maternity leave rights in 185 countries. This does not include providing adequate paternity leave and parental leave.

The imbalance in unpaid care work between women and men becomes even more apparent when raising and caring for a breastfed infant and needs to be addressed urgently. Most countries do not provide paternity leave, and if they do, the leave is usually short (about 9 days on a global average) and low-paid, which can discourage fathers from using the leave. Parental leave, as per ILO standards, is leave available to either parent after maternity leave, and currently, only 68 countries offer parental leave. A non-transferrable parental leave portion allocated to fathers/partners can promote gender equality and increase men's involvement in childcare. **Involved fatherhood can improve breastfeeding and provide much-needed support for the breastfeeding mother.**



Workers in the informal economy are particularly vulnerable to discrimination due to a lack of employment protection and access to social insurance where this exists. Women in the informal economy or self-employed women can be provided with maternity leave cash benefits to ensure they get some maternity protection. These benefits can be extended to fathers/partners in the informal economy through paternity leave cash benefits for them to care for their infants

and support their partners to breastfeed.



Even with adequate maternity and parental leave, lack of support for breastfeeding at the workplace can impede breastfeeding. About 70 countries do not have the statutory right to breastfeeding breaks and most of those countries that do only allow breastfeeding breaks for six months despite breastfeeding being recommended for two years and beyond. A **breastfeeding-**

**friendly workplace** provides time, space and support for women to breastfeed or express their breastmilk. A workplace can also provide crèches and breastfeeding support when needed.

On this labour day, WABA calls upon governments, employers, trade unions, civil society organisations and communities to step up and support breastfeeding. Stakeholders should work together to:

- review and improve national laws that cover maternity and parental social protection for all workers.
- implement and monitor maternity and parental social protection legislation and workplace breastfeeding support in both the formal and informal economy.
- establish breastfeeding-friendly workplaces that provide breastfeeding facilities, paid breastfeeding breaks and flexible working arrangements.
- advocate for publicly-funded paid parental leave that enables exclusive breastfeeding and that promotes the involvement of fathers/partners in childcare and domestic work.



**Empowering Parents  
Campaign**

#WABA #breastfeeding #StepUpforBreastfeeding #MaternityProtection  
#ParentalSocialProtection #EmpoweringParentsCampaign #WBW2022 #ILO #MayDay



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