

# World Breastfeeding Week – 2023: Let's Make Breastfeeding and Work, Work!

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World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) is observed annually from the 1st to the 7th of August to commemorate the Innocenti Declaration of 1990. World Breastfeeding Week is commemorated by WHO, UNICEF, various Ministries of Health, and civil society partners globally.

World Breastfeeding Week began in 1992, with annual themes on variegated topics, namely healthcare systems, the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, community support, ecology, business endeavors, and activities based on science, education, and human rights. World Breastfeeding Week has been linked to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), since 2016. World Breastfeeding Week was duly endorsed as a cardinal breastfeeding promotion tool as per the decision of the World Health Assembly in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

During the week-long period, several international and local organizations join hands in promoting the importance of breastfeeding and its benefits that accrue to the newborns and mothers. In addition, WBW also promotes, defends, and supports women's rights to breastfeed their babies anytime and anywhere.<sup>2</sup>

This year (2023), the theme for WBW is "Let's make breastfeeding and work, work!". The theme lays emphasis on the actions deemed necessary by policymakers, employers, and colleagues to help support continued exclusive breastfeeding in working women to their infants. This will provide a strategic opportunity to vouch for key maternity rights that promote maternity leave for at least 18 weeks, ideally more than 6 months, and workplace accommodation, following this period. These are considered essential facets for proper consideration for ensuring that women can breastfeed for as long as they want. However, it needs to be stated that more than half a billion working women are not provided with basic maternity benefits, and many more are unsupported when they return to work.<sup>3</sup>

The objectives for this year WBW are:

- Inform people about the perspectives of working parents on breastfeeding and parenting
- Establish optimal paid leave and workplace support as important tools to enable breastfeeding
- Collaborate with individuals and organizations to improve collaboration and support for breastfeeding at work, and
- Galvanize action on improving working conditions and relevant breastfeeding support.

Thus, the key messages underlined by WHO for promoting breastfeeding pertaining to the theme of this year are as follows:

- Why making nursing at work a reality helps societies function! Breastfeeding delivers critical health and nutritional benefits to children that last a lifetime, resulting in healthier populations—and workforces—in the future.

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- Women should not be forced to choose between breastfeeding their infants and working. Breastfeeding assistance is available independent of workplace, industry, or contract type.
- Despite this, more than half a billion working women do not have access to essential maternity benefits, and many more are unsupported when they return to work.
- All women everywhere, irrespective of the fact as to where they work, should have:
  - At least 18 weeks, preferably more than 6 months, paid maternity leave
  - Paid time off for breastfeeding or expressing milk upon returning to work
  - Flexible return to work options.<sup>4</sup>

## LET'S ALL STEP UP TO SUPPORT MOTHERS

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