

Breastfeeding arrangements at work and childcare

6

KEY MESSAGES

- Breastfeeding contributes to the health of both mother and child and is particularly important in circumstances where unsafe water can pose a risk to the baby.
- Supporting breastfeeding at work is an integral part of the set of maternity protection measures and international labour standards set out rights and guidance for assisting mothers to continue breastfeeding on their return to work.
- Provision is made in at least 121 countries for breaks or a reduction in daily working hours for nursing mothers. When provided, nursing breaks are largely paid (114 countries).
- Globally, the share of countries lacking statutory provision of nursing breaks in 1994 decreased from 32 to 24 per cent in 2013.
- Almost two-thirds (75) of the countries with provisions allow for a duration of the entitlement to nursing breaks of between six and 23 months.
- Recommendation No. 191 promotes the establishment of facilities for nursing under adequate hygienic conditions at or near the workplace. Only 31 per cent of 159 countries had relevant national legislation.
- Often statutory provisions on nursing or childcare facilities apply if the company employs a minimum number of women and usually they assign the entire cost of provision to the employer, both factors creating potential disincentives to hiring workers with family responsibilities.
- Workplace initiatives alone are not enough: public policies are needed, specifically aimed at improving the availability, quality and affordability of childcare facilities and other work–family measures.
- Evidence shows that childcare plays a key role in enabling parents, especially women, to engage in paid formal work after childbirth.
- Effective work–family measures also result in positive firm-level outcomes, including better performance and commitment, lower rates of absenteeism, higher levels of retention, skills preservation and healthier parents. However, important gaps remain.

Since the first Convention on maternity protection (No. 3), nursing breaks for breastfeeding mothers during working hours have formed part of the international standards on maternity protection. However, the provisions differ. Convention No. 3 stated that a nursing mother should be allowed two 30-minute breaks a day during her working hours for this purpose, while both Convention No. 103 and Convention No. 183 leave it to national laws and

regulations to decide the number and duration of nursing breaks, provided that at least one break is provided. Convention No. 183 also introduced the possibility of converting daily breaks into a daily reduction of hours of work.

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for babies until the age of six months and continued breastfeeding, with appropriate complementary foods, for children of up to 2 years of age or