

PRIORITISE BREASTFEEDING

Create Sustainable Support Systems

WABA | WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2025

Galvanise

actions on connecting breastfeeding support systems to contribute to a more sustainable environment



Inform

people about their role in creating supportive and sustainable environments for breastfeeding



Engage

with individuals and organisations to enhance collaboration and support for breastfeeding



Anchor

continuous breastfeeding support as a vital component to create a sustainable environment



CREATING A SUSTAINABLE BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT SYSTEM

A sustainable breastfeeding support system is an all-of-society approach that **ensures every mother has the support, environment, and resources to breastfeed successfully**, from [conception through the first two years of the child's life](#) and beyond.

Support for breastfeeding must begin in the antenatal period, with health workers trained to provide clear, reassuring, and skilled guidance.

Continued support during hospital stays and especially after discharge is crucial. Mothers need help to manage breastfeeding challenges, gain confidence, and balance breastfeeding with returning to work, especially in the face of widespread unethical marketing by the formula industry. It is a system rooted in continuity, inclusivity, and integration across generations, geographical boundaries, and social layers, a [warm chain of support for breastfeeding](#).



Sustainability Goes Beyond Duration

national, regional, local, and closest to the mother.

health, environment, economy, equity, and emotional wellbeing.



It means building a system that is:

Accessible, acceptable, and affordable

Evidence-based and gender-sensitive.

Facility- and community-based.

Long-term, extending from pregnancy to childhood.

Equitable and integrable within existing healthcare services.

This goes far beyond providing one-time advice, it's about ensuring that breastfeeding support is embedded into every layer of society.

CORE COMPONENTS

Policy Implementation and Monitoring

- National strategies, like those promoted by the [Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding](#), provide the foundation for long-term sustainability.

Health System Integration

- [Baby-Friendly Hospitals](#) are crucial touchpoints, offering skilled counselling and support during antenatal care, delivery, postnatal hospitalisation, and after discharge.

Workplace and Social Protection

- [Empowering women](#) in all settings, including during return to work, is essential to sustaining breastfeeding and achieving gender equality.



Social Norms Promotion

- Breastfeeding should be a visible, normalised practice. A sustainable system promotes early and lifelong exposure to [breastfeeding](#) as a norm.

Community-Based Support

- Breastfeeding success often hinges on [support from peers, neighbours, and community counsellors](#).

Environmental and Climate Sustainability

- Breastfeeding is a [zero-waste, low-carbon, resource-efficient](#) practice that conserves water and energy while minimising pollution and packaging waste.

ACTIONS

1



Policy Implementation and Monitoring: Adopt a Multifaceted, Long-Term Approach

- ✓ Prioritise breastfeeding as the best [investment](#) through implementation of a long-term comprehensive national strategy.
- ✓ Implement and monitor the [International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes](#).
- ✓ Collect and use [data and statistics](#) to monitor and continuously improve ongoing breastfeeding support systems.

2



Health System Integration: Strengthen Health Workforce Capacity

- ✓ Integrate breastfeeding support into the continuum of care — from pregnancy to two years of age and beyond, establishing a [warm chain of support](#).
- ✓ Train and deploy [healthcare workers](#) to provide breastfeeding counselling in antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care.
- ✓ Promote tools like [discharge questionnaires](#) and [educational materials](#) to strengthen hospital-community linkages and ensure quality improvement.

3



Workplace and Social Protection: Expand Workplace Support for Breastfeeding

- ✓ [Mandate paid maternity/paternity and parental leave](#) with protected time for breastfeeding at work.
- ✓ Create [breastfeeding-friendly workplaces](#) that allow women to combine work and breastfeeding.

6



Environmental and Climate Sustainability: Linking Breastfeeding and Planetary Health

- ✓ Include breastfeeding support within national and global sustainability strategies, recognising its role in reducing the environmental burden of formula production.
- ✓ Estimate carbon and water footprint from associated with consumption of commercial breastmilk substitutes using the [green feeding tool](#).

5



Community-Based Support: Empower Communities to Ensure Local Access

- ✓ Encourage [mother-to-mother/peer support](#) as a [widely accessible](#), culturally acceptable, and cost-effective way to strengthen breastfeeding outcomes.
- ✓ Promote community-driven initiatives that complement professional care and provide continuous emotional and practical support to mothers.

4



Social Norms Promotion: Across Society and Generations

- ✓ [Public awareness](#) efforts should address the emotional, physical, and economic benefits of breastfeeding, as well as the [costs of not breastfeeding](#).
- ✓ Children should grow up seeing breastfeeding as a natural and social norm. As [future parents](#), they will instinctively understand its value and process.

EXAMPLES



Global: The Global Breastfeeding Collective – Coordinated International Action

The [Global Breastfeeding Collective](#), led by UNICEF and WHO, is a global initiative that supports countries in building sustainable breastfeeding systems by providing evidence-based tools, advocacy resources, and policy guidance, achieved through a transparent, inclusive, and conflict of interest free network of experienced partners that fosters credibility, trust, and unified global action.



Argentina: Strengthening Breastfeeding Through Policy, Milk Banking, and Digital Support

Argentina promotes breastfeeding through initiatives like the Ramón Carrillo Hospital Human Milk Collection Center (Buenos Aires), the League of Mothers Foundation in Chaco with over 5,000 milk donors, and the [ISO-certified Human Milk Bank](#) in Mendoza. These efforts are supported by National Law 26873, continuous professional training for healthcare workers, and community WhatsApp groups led by trained facilitators. This sustainable support system was achieved through coordinated policy, community-based digital outreach, and education.



Australia: Long-Term Maternal and Child Support

The [Maternal Child and Family Health \(MCFH\)](#) system in Victoria offers up to 5 years of follow-up by community nurses after birth, supporting child development and breastfeeding. However, lactation is not emphasised enough in training, and breastfeeding data collection is limited. Strengthening these gaps could enhance what is already a strong, long-term maternal support model.



China: Digital Verification and Postnatal Quality Monitoring

China scaled [BFHI](#) training based on the WHO “Baby-friendly hospital initiative training course for maternity staff”. It also created a national digital competency verification platform with feedback loop and a postnatal discharge questionnaire system that identifies gaps in breastfeeding support for quality improvement. Within a year, more than 3667 health workers became certified breastfeeding consultants. More than 100 online educational videos provide information and support for mothers after discharge from the hospital. The system uses a continuous data-driven, technology-enabled approach that includes both healthcare workers and families with infants.



Honduras: Legal Advocacy and Hospital-Based Lactation Services

Honduras promotes breastfeeding through legal frameworks established by the [National Breastfeeding Commission](#), which support workplace lactation rooms and BFHI implementation in major hospitals like IHSS (Tegucigalpa) and Mario Catarino Rivas. Human milk banking and training workshops for mothers and healthcare workers further strengthen care. Monthly coordination meetings ensure follow-through, making this system sustainable through legal advocacy, institutional reform, and ongoing capacity-building.



India: Urban Innovation and Rural Peer Models

In Mumbai, collaboration between [BPNI Maharashtra](#), Maharashtra state government, UNICEF and hospitals resulted in mass breastfeeding training at various levels. Furthermore, it included the creation of 1000 breastfeeding rooms at workplaces (Hirkani Rooms), multilingual breastfeeding apps, comprehensive immunisation/breastfeeding clinics, facility-based mother-support group and more than 100 deployed IBCLCs amongst others. About 25% of the population of Mumbai, 5 million thus have access to breastfeeding counselling.

In [Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh](#), trained Mother Support Groups (MSGs) offered 24/7 breastfeeding counselling and frequent structured home visits in 600 villages. People identified from the local population were trained as trainers and in turn mentored the MSGs. Within 2 years, early initiation of breastfeeding rose from 11% to 71%, and exclusive breastfeeding from 7% to 50%, with sustained outcomes.

Both models reflect decades-long goal-driven collaboration, community engagement, and local innovation.



Japan: Professional-Peer Collaboration for Sustainable Breastfeeding Support

In Japan, breastfeeding support is sustained through collaboration between La Leche League (LLL) Japan and the Japanese Association of Lactation Consultants (JALC). LLL Japan was formed in 1992. The first IBCLC was certified in Japan in 1995, and JALC was founded in 1999 by four IBCLCs. JALC provides professional training, various on-site and online educational resources and mentorship, while LLL Japan offers peer counselling and communication skills [workshops](#). Many IBCLCs support both organisations through volunteering and [translation](#). The strong alliance between professionals and peer supporters ensures mothers receive consistent, skilled, and compassionate breastfeeding support across clinical and community settings contributing to sustainability.



Kuwait: A Blended Healthcare-Community System

Kuwait launched a national IYCF strategy in 2020, embedding unified antenatal counselling education tools in electronic health systems and establishing postnatal breastfeeding support clinics. Lactation units in hospitals, like the model at Al-Adan Hospital, ensure BFHI implementation and continuous training. Community-based support is reinforced by [BirthKuwait](#), a non-profit offering peer counselling, home visits, a hotline, and workshops, creating an integrated national strategy coupled with community support for breastfeeding.



Malaysia: Hospital and Community Synergy

Malaysia advanced breastfeeding through national adoption of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) by the Ministry of Health and the strengthening of community support by the [Malaysian Breastfeeding Peer Counsellor Association](#) (MBfPCA). Hospitals standardised best practices under government policy, while MBfPCA trained volunteers to offer peer counselling beyond hospital settings thus making breastfeeding support more accessible. Continuous professional training and public awareness campaigns helped normalise breastfeeding across sectors. Collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organisations is key.

Nigeria: Advocacy and Policy Drive Exclusive Breastfeeding Gains

Nigeria's '[Zero Water' campaign](#), launched under the Start Strong IYCF initiative, used advocacy and multimedia messaging to promote exclusive breastfeeding. With support from Alive & Thrive and UNICEF, exclusive breastfeeding rates in Lagos and Kaduna States rose from 25% to 43% and 59% to 64%, respectively, from 2017 to 2020. In 2021, Nigeria introduced paternity leave and a Code enforcement mechanism. The initiative is now expanding to five more states, showing how policy, communication, and monitoring can sustainably improve breastfeeding practices.



Sweden: Government-Led Success and the Cost of Withdrawal

Sweden's national breastfeeding support was strong from 1972-1975 and 1985-2003, led by the National Board of Health and Welfare in partnership with Amningshjälpen, a mother-to-mother support group. BFHI was launched in 1992, improving outcomes. Since 2003, however, national promotion has declined, leading to a 20% drop in exclusive breastfeeding rates. More recently the national authorities together with a breastfeeding committee that includes health professional organisations and NGOs has launched a [national breastfeeding strategy](#). Continuous commitment and coordination at the government level, along with strong collaboration with NGOs, are essential for elevating the status of breastfeeding and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

New Zealand: Māori-Led, Whānau-Centered Care

Founded by a highly regarded community elder, Dame Aroha Reriti-Crofts, the [Te Puawaitanga ki Ōtautahi Trust](#) provides culturally grounded care for Māori families. Services include nursing, antenatal and postnatal breastfeeding peer support, and advocacy for breastfeeding-friendly spaces in the workplace and commercial outlets. Staff are recruited from the community and trained using a Māori cultural-based approach, with government support helping the trust grow and strengthen confidence among the increasing number of families served.



Peru: Policy, Culture, and Community for a National Breastfeeding Strategy

Peru was a pioneer in 1982 by incorporating the International Code into its national Infant Feeding Regulation (RAI). Between 1992 and 2024, [the Ministry of Health](#) of Peru certified 460 Baby-Friendly Health Facilities nationwide. Early initiation of breastfeeding increased from 19.9% in 1992 to 48% in 2023, while exclusive breastfeeding increased from 19.5% to 67.4% by 2024. Since 2006, [the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations](#) has implemented over 5,500 workplace lactation rooms. Since 1998, [Lactared](#), a civil society network, has trained professionals in breastfeeding counselling and supported the development of new IBCLCs in Peru.



United Arab Emirates: Policy-Driven Gains and Environmental/Climate Advocacy

Exclusive breastfeeding rose by 10% through expanded BFHI, mother support groups, and the [Sharjah Baby-Friendly City Project](#). National policies include paid maternity leave (90 days) and paternity leave (5 days), breastfeeding breaks (two hours for six months and one hour for six months), and full adoption of the Code. UAE also emphasises breastfeeding's role in climate action, noting that formula production emits 11–14 kg CO₂ and uses 5,000+ L of water per kg, positioning breastfeeding as part of its national environmental sustainability strategy for a healthy planet.

CONCLUSION

Creating a sustainable breastfeeding support system is not a short-term intervention, it is a continuous, inclusive, and empowering structure that safeguards health, protects the environment, and upholds the rights of women and children.

When integrated across policies, health systems, workplaces and communities, breastfeeding becomes more than a feeding choice — it becomes a pillar of sustainable development. It should be a [priority](#) everywhere!

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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.

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