

GUIDEBOOK SERIES

Enhancing your workforce
nutrition programme



BREAST FEEDING SUPPORT

A practical guide for employers to create
breastfeeding-friendly workplaces

**WORKFORCE
NUTRITION ALLIANCE**

**Breastfeeding is not
a one-woman job.**

Version

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Workforce Nutrition Alliance

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

A practical tool

This guidebook serves as a practical tool for employers to provide breastfeeding support to mothers. It is part of building a successful workforce nutrition programme – and a strong workforce – in your organisation.

This guide is one in a series of four produced by the Workforce Nutrition Alliance on the pillars of a strong workforce nutrition programme: breastfeeding support, healthy food at work, nutrition education and nutrition-related health checks.

All four guides are publicly available on our [website](#) with the aim of helping employers to enhance their workforce nutrition programmes.

Who we are

The Workforce Nutrition Alliance was launched by the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in October 2019. It aims to impact three million employees in member organisations and supply chains by 2025.

We encourage employers that are excited about improving their workforce nutrition programme to enrol in one of our implementation support programmes.

A glass door with a white circle containing the number 1 and a sign of a person holding a baby.

1

**Before you start
with this guidebook**

GUIDEBOOK INTRODUCTION

Before you start



Who is this guidebook for?

Employers that wish to create family-friendly workplaces that support working mothers and mothers-to-be will find this guide helpful. While this handbook serves as a practical guide for businesses, it can also be used by other organisations that offer support to female employees, such as non-profit, civil society, academic, or government organisations.



What is covered in this guidebook?

Guidance is shared on how to accommodate the needs of breastfeeding mothers when they return to work as well as other policies aimed at promoting maternal and child health and well-being. The guidebook also helps employers to raise awareness among all staff about how and why it is important to support working mothers.



Why is this guidebook important?

Breastfeeding provides optimal nutrition for babies. Not breastfeeding can negatively affect the health and well-being of mothers and children. Employers can directly impact the health of their workforce and their children, and in doing so benefit their business as well. It is also a way to contribute to the nutrition targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as supporting mothers at work significantly benefits employee health. Find out more about this topic in this [factsheet](#) developed by UNICEF.



Definition of ‘workplace breastfeeding support’

Workplace breastfeeding support includes programmes or company policies that enable working mothers to breastfeed exclusively for six months and continually up to two years. Such programmes can include: respecting or exceeding national laws on duration of paid maternity leave (ensuring six months minimum); providing an appropriate place and time to express/pump milk during work hours; and providing options for working mothers such as on-site child care and flexible work schedules. Programmes can also include awareness-raising or nutrition education campaigns for mothers and co-workers on the importance of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding support is sometimes referred to as lactation support, by which we refer to the same.



Recommended breastfeeding practices

Breastfeeding, also called nursing, is the process of feeding a mother's breastmilk to her baby, either directly from the breast or by expressing/pumping the milk from the breast and feeding it to the baby. The World Health Organization recommends that mothers begin breastfeeding their babies within one hour of birth, breastfeed exclusively (no other liquids or foods) for the first six months, and continue to breastfeed, along with adequate complementary foods, for two years of age and beyond.

Artificial feeding with formula milk has been shown to put children at higher risk of infection and other disease, as well as limiting child growth and development. It is therefore not recommended over breastfeeding. However, in some cases breastfeeding might not be possible due to personal or individual reasons. This guidebook's References section includes resources for formula-feeding in a safe way.

BUSINESS CASE

The evidence of impact

The benefits summed up

Successful organisations know that a healthy workforce benefits everyone – while an unhealthy workforce will negatively impact your bottom line.

Supporting breastfeeding mothers is a key pillar of an effective workforce nutrition programme and can complement existing health and wellness programmes. Implementation of breastfeeding support is relatively easy and cost-effective and results in substantial benefits to working mothers and their children, including:

The benefits of workforce breastfeeding support



The evidence of impact

In our [Workplace Breastfeeding Support evidence brief](#)⁴, we summarise the evidence for impact of workplace breastfeeding support, which is strong. A recent systematic review of 22 programmes in nine countries found that having a dedicated breastfeeding space at work significantly increases the period of exclusive breastfeeding and the period of breastfeeding with complementary feeding.⁵ This study also found that in order to prolong breastfeeding, breastfeeding rooms were more important than dedicated breaks.

Furthermore, several studies show benefits beyond the nutritional advantages for the child. This includes improved productivity and reduced sick days in working mothers, and decreased healthcare costs. Employee retention also increased.^{6,7,8} There is substantial evidence to suggest that breastfeeding reduces absence in employees who are parents because their infants are ill less often.⁹ Companies in Viet Nam with lactation programmes show significantly higher worker retention rates (94%) than the national average (59%).¹⁰ One-day absences to care for sick children occur more than twice as often for mothers who formula feed than those who breastfeed.^{11,12}

This translates into a substantial return on investment for business. The United States Breastfeeding Committee reports that for every USD 1 invested to support breastfeeding, employers realise a cost saving of USD 3.⁹



Health benefits of breastfeeding for working women

Breastfeeding provides significant health benefits to women returning to work post-delivery, as well as their baby. These support a smooth transition back into the workforce and minimize absenteeism due to illness or to care for an ill child:

Survival rate

Breastfeeding is the most effective way to positively impact a child's survival rate, with the potential to prevent 13% of all deaths in children under five years of age in the developing world.

Food and water

Breastmilk provides all the food and water an infant needs for the first six months of life.

Antibodies

Breastmilk is completely hygienic and contains antibodies that protect infants from disease.

Adjusted to needs

Breastmilk's composition adjusts to serve the special needs of pre-term infants, newborns, and older infants.

Brain development

Breastmilk includes fatty acids absent in formula or animal milks that are important in brain development.

Mother-child bonding

Breastfeeding promotes mother-child bonding and psychosocial development.

Less likely to get sick

A breastfed infant is less likely to get sick or die from diarrhoea or pneumonia, and to have allergies or ear infections. When they get older, they are less likely to be overweight, obese or suffer from chronic disease.

Improved intelligence

There is evidence that exclusive breastfeeding improves a child's performance on intelligence tests.

Recovery

Exclusive breastfeeding delays the return of menstruation, helping mothers recover iron stores which reduces anaemia and the weakness it causes.

Lower chance of cancer

Women who breastfeed have lower rates of premenopausal breast and ovarian cancers.

Good practice

CASE 1

Breastfeeding rooms and support to mothers enhances worker satisfaction¹³


Country

Bangladesh


Sector

Textile and garment


Case

Sparrow Apparels Ltd in Gazipur, on the outskirts of Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, has an on-site childcare centre. Mothers can use well-equipped breastfeeding rooms adjacent to the childcare centre twice a day to breastfeed their children. A dedicated attendant at the breastfeeding centre makes sure the babies are fed the stored breastmilk at later times during the day. Three nurses and two doctors from the factory's childcare centre are there to counsel the nursing mothers on breastfeeding and proper child health care. The breastfeeding mothers get two additional breaks (30 minutes each) before and after the lunchtime to spend time with their little ones.

Working mother 28-year-old Tania Akther said of the company's breastfeeding support programme, "I can take care of my son, and I can feed him properly. Keeping my son closer to me even in the workplace and knowing that he is safe and growing up healthy gives me peace of mind. This helps me to concentrate on my work better. Having such facilities is very helpful and as a mother, I can't ask for a better workplace."



CASE 2

Breastmilk delivery from workplaces to homes: An innovative approach to support mothers¹⁴



Country
Indonesia



Sector
Textile and garment



Case

Better Work Indonesia's garment factory PT Ungaran Sari Garments has taken great steps to support its working mothers. In addition to a lactation room, prenatal yoga classes and a post-maternity health programme, it has moved ahead with a new breastmilk delivery initiative, ensuring that female employees' babies always have supply of breastmilk while their mothers are at work.

After considering the difficulties faced by women employees when coming back from their maternity leave, a breastmilk courier service was started. After a mother expresses or pumps her breastmilk, it is stored in a dedicated room at the workplace and then delivered home to her baby. Considering that more than 95% of the factory's 15,000 workers are women, their empowerment is one of the company's key focus areas.

"Now I will have no worry that my baby will run out of milk at home. Breastfeeding can boost a child's immune system and, at the same time, I can save money instead of spending it on formula milk," said Pangestuti Ayuningtyas, a 27-year-old working mother.

A woman with curly hair is breastfeeding her baby. A hand is visible supporting her back. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

2

The basics of breastfeeding support

BUILDING YOUR PROGRAMME

GET GOING

Three steps to supporting mothers in the workplace



Review

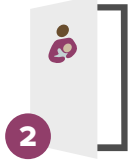
Develop and review your organisation's policies and guidance related to:

Maternity and parental leave

Flexible working hours and/or location after return from maternity leave

Break times for breastfeeding

Use of breastfeeding rooms or spaces



Arrange

Select and arrange breastfeeding rooms:

Identify the number of female employees and the need for breastfeeding rooms.

Create private and hygienic rooms (min. 6m²), partitioned from other spaces, equipped with refrigerator, sterilisers, table, chairs, and, if possible, breastmilk pumps.

Monitor the use of breastfeeding rooms regularly, for example by inclusion in an annual staff survey or sign-in sheets in the rooms.



Support

Create a workplace culture that is supportive of breastfeeding:

Develop educational materials (leaflets, posters) about recommended breastfeeding practices, nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and breastfeeding policy and regulations.

Organise trainings on breastfeeding, how to use the breastfeeding room, and breastmilk expression and storage in collaboration with relevant groups or association (local breastfeeding support group, community-based organisations, or the public health system).

Orient your organisation's human resources staff, health staff and labour union representatives to raise awareness about women's labour rights and benefits, and to increase the capacity of staff to address the needs of female workers. Ensure all staff members are updated on the companies' policy by including this information in the staff handbook, sharing it at new staff orientation meetings and providing updates at all staff meetings.

Key successes and challenges



Key elements for success

To support breastfeeding mothers in the workplace well, think about including these elements to make it a success.

Offer breaks

Comply with local laws mandating paid breastfeeding breaks and spaces or going beyond the current legal framework to increase support.

Provide facilities

Provide adequate facilities and equipment for breastfeeding.

Assign staff

Assign a staff member to be a focal point for the breastfeeding support programme.

Monitor

Monitor and support the programme.

Policy

Support female employees through the development of a breastfeeding policy.

Encouragement

Encourage mothers to use their entire paid maternity leave.

Non-discriminatory hiring

Ensure non-discriminatory hiring practices.

Invest in HR

Commit to investing in human resources in the present and in the future.



Key challenges to address

Companies must usually address a number of the below challenges to properly support breastfeeding mothers in the workplace.

Supportive work environment

Why? Support from company management, director supervisors and co-workers is an essential condition to implement a workplace lactation support programme.

Maternity leave and work hours

Why? A policy for short maternity leave or long work shifts causes many women to stop breastfeeding.

Identifying space for a breastfeeding room

Why? Some industries are usually located in high rent buildings where it may be more difficult to find space that could be used to set up a breastfeeding room.

Adequate number of breastfeeding rooms

Why? Employers with a large number of female employees need to make sure a room is available for all employees whether they are working in offices or in production lines.

Monitoring progress

Why? It is essential to monitor the usage of breastfeeding rooms and breaks. This includes the collection of employee feedback, to identify barriers to use and solutions to address them.

A woman is shown from the chest up, sitting and breastfeeding a baby. She is wearing a dark, patterned top and a necklace. The baby is lying on its back, attached to the breast. They are positioned on a light-colored cloth with a floral pattern. To the left of the baby, there is a small, light-colored teddy bear. The background is slightly out of focus, showing a window with curtains. The entire image has a semi-transparent purple overlay.

3

Simple solutions for breastfeeding support

PUTTING YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION

Develop a breastfeeding policy



All-round advice

Policy to support employees

The development of a breastfeeding policy in the workplace is paramount for encouraging and supporting employees in their efforts to balance work and breastfeeding.

Policy to plan out the practicalities

The policy should delineate a plan for maternity leave, a flexible work schedule, and break times for expressing or pumping breastmilk at work. It should also encompass the rules and regulations for using the dedicated room to express or pump and store breastmilk.



Simple solutions

Adhere to regulations

Adhere to local regulations, and optimally, go beyond but at the very least 18 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Share information

Distribute the information to all staff and integrate the information in general human resources policies, so it is easy to find for all staff.

Review and update

Make sure to review and update policies regularly, for example by including questions about the policy (acceptability, use, and experience) in an annual staff survey.



Practical guidance

Content suggestions for breastfeeding policy and regulations

- Purpose and scope of the document
- Maternity and parental leave
- Flexible working time and/or location after return from maternity leave
- Breastfeeding breaks
- Access to the breastfeeding room
- Use of equipment in the breastfeeding room
- Contact persons for questions or suggestions

Three standards

Key elements of workplace nutrition programme breastfeeding support initiative.

Topic	Indicator	Basic	Better	Best	Table 01
Worker engagement	Participation	All line management is sensitised to the breastfeeding support programme and new employees receive orientation.	All staff members are sensitised to the breastfeeding support programme and new employees receive orientation.	Female employees are engaged in development of the breastfeeding support programme, all staff members are sensitised to the programme and new employees receive orientation.	
Parental leave (paid)	Availability	Improved parental leave available to at least 50% of all female employees.	Improved parental leave available to at least 50% of all employees.	Improved parental leave available to all employees.	
	Longevity	18 weeks maternity leave postpartum with at least two-thirds pay for all employees.	19 weeks up to six months maternity leave with at least two-thirds pay and additional parental leave option for spouse of up to two weeks.	At least six months maternity leave at full pay and additional parental leave option for spouse of up to three months.	
Flexible working	Longevity	Flexible working time and/or location policy applicable for one year post-partum.	Flexible working time and/or location policy applicable for one year post-partum.	Flexible working time and/or location policy applicable for two years post-partum.	
Breastfeeding rooms	Availability	Breastfeeding rooms available to 50-75% of female employees for two years and beyond.	Breastfeeding rooms available to at least 75% of female employees for two years and beyond.	Breastfeeding rooms available to at least 75% of female employees for two years and beyond.	
	Proximity	Within 10 min walk from the workplace.	Available in the workplace.*	Available in the workplace.*	
	Quality	Non-dedicated private breastfeeding space with basic storage facilities for breastmilk and hand washing sink nearby.	Private, hygienic, dedicated breastfeeding space (min. 6m ²) with clean storage facilities for storing breastmilk and hand washing sink inside the room.	Private, hygienic, dedicated breastfeeding space (min. 6m ²) with clean storage facilities for storing breastmilk, hand washing sink inside and a decent level of comfort, that is airconditioned.	
Breaks	Longevity	One dedicated 30-minute paid breastfeeding break per day during working hours.	Two dedicated 30-minute paid breastfeeding breaks per day during working hours or at least one hour of paid break time.	Up to three dedicated 30-minute paid breastfeeding breaks per day during working hours, and/or flexible working time and location.	

*In some areas, you might also consider including the availability of a nursery centre. Ideally, there is a nursery centre near the workplace that can care for infants when maternity leave ends.

Create breastfeeding rooms



All-round advice

Create safe spaces

It is of utmost importance for a breastfeeding mother returning to work to have a comfortable and safe area where she can express or pump and store milk during the workday. Simple breastfeeding rooms can be created. Companies with large numbers of female employees can install partitions or curtains in the lactation room to accommodate multiple users, depending on local customs and culture.



Simple solutions

Space identification

The space needed for a lactation room is minimal. The size of the room can be as small as 6m² to accommodate a comfortable chair, a small table, and a refrigerator. It should be shielded from view and free from intrusion from co-workers and the public.

Number of rooms needed

The number of rooms needed depends on the size of the company, the number of female employees of childbearing age, and the number of buildings. If it takes women a long time to walk to the lactation room, consider setting up multiple sites that are more conveniently located.

Scheduling room usage

If a large number of breastfeeding employees will use the room, employers may want to consider scheduling usage of the room. If only a few women are using the room, a 'first-come, first-served' policy is most effective.

Storage and safety

Breastmilk should be stored in the refrigerator in the breastfeeding room to preserve it and keep it free from contamination.

Labelling

Breastmilk should always be labelled with the employee's name and the date it was collected. Employees must take responsibility for storing their own milk as instructed during orientation sessions and as posted on guidelines in the lactation room.

Cleaning the room

Breastfeeding support programme policies should stipulate that individual users take responsibility for keeping the room clean. Disinfectant wipes or spray should be provided so that each user can clean the outside of the pump and the area around the pump when she is finished. Wastebaskets should be emptied daily. If a cleaning team is not available, consider a schedule that assigns users to conduct routine inspection and cleaning of the room.

Monitoring use

Interact with users to receive feedback on any adaptations or improvements the lactation room may need. Consider including the monitoring in annual staff surveys. Optionally, also keep a record book filled in by the room's users to monitor how often and when the lactation room is used.



Practical guidance

Table 02

Checklist for setting up a lactation room.

	Basic	Complete
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electrical outlet• Room with a curtain• Refrigerator• Chair• Table• Monitoring book	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electrical outlet for each user• Refrigerator for breastmilk only• Tissue and wipes• Fan or air conditioning• Boiler• Sterilizer• Shelf• Multi-user breast pump
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shielded from view• Clean, ventilated room• Signboard for the room• 10 min walk from workplace• Clean running water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quiet room• Available in the workplace• Sink in the room
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies and regulations included in staff handbook and staff orientation meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leaflets and posters on breastfeeding

Develop educational materials



All-round advice

Raise awareness

Develop educational materials to raise awareness of the breastfeeding support programme among mothers and other staff, particularly managers. You can do this in collaboration with health staff or external partners like breastfeeding support groups.

Educate

Orient or educate all female staff on managing work and breastfeeding. This can be conducted by company health staff or contracted externally.

Train

Train labour union officers and health staff on how to support breastfeeding.



Simple solutions

Educational materials

Use different materials that are easily accessible to the audience, for example posters, leaflets, and animated videos.

Integrate

Make breastfeeding support part of broader nutritional education. Read the guidebook on nutrition education for more insights on suitable forms and content of nutrition education.



Practical guidance

Checklist of topics to cover in educational or training sessions

Female employees

Pregnant or with children under two years of age

- Benefits of breastfeeding
- Effective techniques for milk expression or pumping
- Storage and handling of breastmilk
- Maintaining and building milk supply
- Communicating maternal health needs to supervisors
- Adjusting to the physical and emotional demands of returning to work

Other staff

Human resources and health staff members, management

- Female labour policy, facts on breastfeeding
- The role of trade unions in implementing workplace lactation support programmes
- Methodologies for organising workshops and training courses
- Dissemination of information on the labour law
- Supporting breastfeeding in the workplace



4

Tracking change

MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS

TRACKING CHANGE

Monitor your progress

Monitoring is a key success factor for any workforce nutrition programme. Collecting data and evaluating outcomes can help you quantify your programme's impact and inform future decisions. Monitoring can also alert you to coming challenges before they become problems. Including a plan for monitoring from the start will help keep the programme on track.



First answer the following questions:

What do you want to know?

How will you gather and measure data?

Who is responsible for the process?

What do successful outcomes look like?

What will you do with the information that is collected?

We've included some examples to help you think through the outcomes that you may want to monitor to help determine if your programme is a success and whether it needs any course correction.

1. Reach

Monitoring reach provides insights in how many employees have access to the breastfeeding support programme, and how many of them actually use these services. If only a small number of employees are using the services offered, you may want to gather feedback on the reason for this.

Measurement example

The percentage of workers with access to an active breastfeeding support programme, as per policy (e.g. the percentage of workers with access to all elements of the breastfeeding support policy, including parental leave, sensitization trainings, breastfeeding/lactation rooms and breaks).

The percentage of workers who participate in the breastfeeding support programme as per policy (of all workers with access to the breastfeeding support programme), e.g. the percentage of workers who participate in improved parental leave, and sensitization trainings or the percentage of mothers returning to work who use breastfeeding/lactation rooms, and breastfeeding breaks.

2. Breastfeeding practices

Monitoring breastfeeding practices among your female workforce helps you understand the impact of your programme.

Measurement examples

The percentage of female workers with access to the breastfeeding support programme who report to have exclusively breastfed up to six months of age of their infant (born or breastfeeding while mother is employed).

The percentage of workers with access to the breastfeeding support programme who kept breastfeeding their child (born or breastfed while mother is employed) for at least two years.

A woman wearing a patterned headscarf and a patterned top is holding a baby. A large white circle with the number 5 is overlaid on the image.

5

References

TOOLS TO LEARN MORE

LEARN MORE

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Providing a breast milk delivery service to support workers' exclusive breastfeeding programme (2019).

LEARN MORE

Additional resources



Useful downloads

Alive & Thrive

Policy paper on workplace lactation programs in Viet Nam

Alive & Thrive

Toolkit for infant and young child feeding counseling services: A social franchise model

Global Health Media

Videos about expressing and storing breastmilk

UNICEF

Guide on breastfeeding support at the workplace

UNICEF

Brochure on maternal nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding
(can be adapted to local culture/context)

UNICEF

Brochure on how to breastfeed your baby
(can be adapted to local culture or context)

WHO

Publication on preparing formula for bottle-feeding safely



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