

World Breastfeeding Week 2026

SUN CSN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Prioritize breastfeeding: create sustainable support systems



A practical resource for Civil Society Alliances to connect breastfeeding protection with private sector engagement, accountability and safeguards

For adaptation and use by SUN Civil Society Alliance members and partners

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PURPOSE AND NARRATIVE

Breastfeeding is not only a health issue. It is a food systems, equity, rights and accountability issue.

World Breastfeeding Week is an opportunity to advocate not only for breastfeeding, but for the sustainable support systems that make breastfeeding possible. Mothers and caregivers need skilled counselling, family and community support, maternity protection, safe workplaces, strong health systems, social protection and protection from harmful commercial influence.

For SUN Civil Society Alliances, this is also a timely entry point to discuss private sector engagement in a practical and principled way. Some private sector actors can help create enabling environments for breastfeeding, such as employers that provide paid leave, lactation breaks and safe spaces. Other actors, especially where commercial interests are linked to breast-milk substitutes, require strong regulation, monitoring and accountability rather than partnership.

CORE POSITIONING

Breastfeeding should be understood as the first food system. Protecting it means putting children, mothers and public health before commercial interests.

Useful facts for advocacy

THEME	MESSAGE
Child survival	More than 820,000 children's lives could be saved each year if breastfeeding recommendations were followed from birth to 23 months.
Early nutrition	Breastmilk is the only food infants need for the first six months and remains important to two years and beyond alongside safe, nutritious complementary foods.
Infants under six months	1 in 5 infants under six months are malnourished. Their wellbeing is closely linked to the health and wellbeing of their mother or primary caregiver.
The Code matters	Exclusive breastfeeding rates are higher in countries with legislation substantially aligned with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.
Food systems	Breastmilk is the shortest food chain: mother to child. It requires no industrial production, packaging, transport or waste.

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KEY ADVOCACY MESSAGES

Use or adapt these messages for statements, social media, events and meetings with decision-makers.

1

Governments must adopt, strengthen and enforce the International Code

Governments must adopt, strengthen and enforce the International Code, including rules on digital marketing, with effective monitoring and meaningful penalties for violations.

2

Breastfeeding is the first food system.

Breastmilk is every child's first food and a vital part of food systems. Breastfeeding must be recognised in nutrition, food systems, health, social protection and climate discussions.

3

Sustainable breastfeeding support requires systems, not slogans.

Mothers and caregivers need skilled counselling, health services, family and community support, maternity protection, safe workplaces, clean water and sanitation, mental health support and protection from harmful marketing.

4

Parents deserve evidence, not marketing.

Parents and caregivers should be able to make infant and young child feeding decisions based on trusted, independent information, not commercial pressure. Formula companies increasingly target parents through social media, influencers, parenting apps and online support groups, often disguising promotion as trusted advice.

5

In emergencies, breastfeeding can be lifesaving.

When food, clean water, health care and essential supplies are disrupted, breastfeeding provides safe nutrition, immune protection and food security for the youngest children. Infant and young child feeding support must be fully integrated into humanitarian response.

6

Private sector engagement must be guided by public interest.

Civil society can engage constructively with employers and other actors that help create breastfeeding-friendly environments. But where commercial interests undermine breastfeeding, civil society's role is to monitor, expose harmful practices and advocate for regulation.

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Supporting breastfeeding is also a climate-smart choice.

Breastfeeding protects child health and reduces reliance on industrially produced, packaged and transported substitutes. It should be part of sustainable food systems advocacy.

World Breastfeeding Week can help CSAs explain that private sector engagement is not a single yes-or-no question. The right approach depends on the actor, the issue, the risks and the safeguards in place.

APPROACH	POSSIBLE ACTORS / SITUATIONS	CSA ROLE
Engage when the actor can help create an enabling environment and there is no direct conflict of interest.	Employers, workplace associations, media outlets, technology platforms, retailers without BMS interests.	Advocate for paid maternity leave, lactation breaks, breastfeeding rooms, accurate information, flexible work and supportive workplace policies.
Monitor when private practices may influence infant feeding choices, health workers, advertising or public narratives.	Formula companies, distributors, retailers, online advertisers, influencers, health professional sponsorship channels, media platforms.	Track practices, document concerns, report potential Code violations, raise awareness and engage regulators.
Say no / regulate when the activity creates conflict of interest, normalises BMS promotion or violates the Code.	Sponsorship, gifts, branded materials, samples, inappropriate donations in emergencies, industry-led education, partnership offers from BMS companies.	Decline conflicted support, advocate for stronger laws and enforcement, protect public health spaces from commercial influence.

SIMPLE RULE FOR CSA MEMBERS

Engagement should never weaken breastfeeding protection, legitimise harmful marketing, create conflicts of interest, or replace government responsibility for regulation and public health guidance.

Red lines to consider

- Do not accept sponsorship, gifts, branded materials or funding from breast-milk substitute companies.
- Do not promote or distribute BMS products, samples or vouchers during WBW activities.
- Do not allow commercial brands to provide infant feeding advice to parents, caregivers, health workers or communities.
- Do not frame formula marketing as neutral information when it may influence feeding decisions and undermine breastfeeding.

Ask governments to

1. Adopt, strengthen and enforce the Code and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions in national law, with independent monitoring and clear sanctions.
2. Invest in breastfeeding support through quality counselling before, during and after childbirth, including community-based and facility-based support.
3. Protect breastfeeding in emergencies by fully integrating infant and young child feeding into preparedness and humanitarian response, including skilled support and safe care for infants who cannot be breastfed.
4. Embed breastfeeding in national child health, nutrition and social protection strategies including early initiation, exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and continued breastfeeding to two years and beyond.
5. Address malnutrition in infants under six months by adopting and scaling the MAMI Care Pathway within national health and nutrition systems.
6. Strengthen maternity protection including paid leave, lactation breaks, safe and private spaces for expressing and storing breastmilk, and protections for women working in informal settings.

Ask donors and development partners to

- Fund breastfeeding counselling, community support and health worker capacity as core nutrition and child survival interventions.
- Support independent Code monitoring and enforcement, especially in fragile and low-income settings.
- Ensure humanitarian programmes protect, promote and support breastfeeding and do not create parallel supply-driven approaches that increase risk for infants.
- Support civil society to monitor conflicts of interest and advocate for stronger regulatory frameworks.

Ask employers and workplace actors to

- Create breastfeeding-friendly workplaces with paid breaks, safe private spaces, clean storage options and supportive supervisors.
- Adopt family-friendly policies that support all caregivers, including women in low-paid and informal work where possible.
- Avoid any partnership or materials linked to BMS promotion or brands.

MOMENT	ACTION	PRIVATE SECTOR / ACCOUNTABILITY ANGLE
Before WBW	Map national policy opportunities: Code legislation, maternity protection, IYCF in emergencies, MAMI, workplace support.	Agree red lines for any private sector involvement and check potential conflicts of interest.
During WBW	Host a policy dialogue, press briefing, community conversation or online campaign using the key messages in this toolkit.	Frame breastfeeding protection as a public interest issue, not only an individual choice.
After WBW	Follow up with ministries, parliamentarians, regulators, employers and donors on concrete commitments.	Document lessons, Code concerns and examples of supportive policies to feed into SUN CSN peer learning.

Ideas for national adaptation

- Add your country's latest breastfeeding data and policy gaps.
- Identify whether your country has national Code legislation, assess possible gaps and how enforcement works in practice.
- Organise workshops with investors in BMS companies; work with activists on the environmental impact of BMS; work with communities for maternity protection solutions in the informal sector (e.g. microinsurance schemes).
- Highlight one local story of a mother, caregiver, health worker or employer helping make breastfeeding possible.
- Connect WBW to existing nutrition, health, food systems, social protection, climate or humanitarian advocacy moments.
- Coordinate with government and UN partners while maintaining civil society's independent accountability role.

SUGGESTED CSA ACTIVITY

Run a short dialogue using three questions: What helps mothers breastfeed in our context? What commercial or policy barriers undermine breastfeeding? What should civil society monitor, engage on or challenge over the next 12 months?

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READY-TO-USE SOCIAL MEDIA PACK

Adapt, translate and localise. Add national facts, photos and partner tags.

VISUAL GUIDANCE

Use respectful images showing supportive environments; avoid formula tins, branded products or feeding equipment unless discussing Code violations; avoid blaming mothers; and translate messages into local languages where possible.

Suggested hashtags: #WorldBreastfeedingWeek #WBW2026 #PrioritizeBreastfeeding #SUNCSN #NutritionForAll #FirstFood #PrivateSectorAccountability

POST 1

Breastfeeding is the first food system. Protecting it means investing in the policies, services, workplaces and communities that help mothers and caregivers give children the healthiest possible start.

POST 3

Private sector engagement in nutrition must be guided by public interest. Engage where it supports breastfeeding. Monitor where risks exist. Say no where conflicts of interest undermine child health.

POST 5

Family-friendly workplaces matter. Paid leave, lactation breaks, safe private spaces and supportive managers help mothers continue breastfeeding. Supporting breastfeeding is good for families, workers and economies.

POST 2

Parents deserve evidence, not marketing. This World Breastfeeding Week, we call for stronger implementation and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

POST 4

Breastfeeding support is a child survival intervention. In crises, breastmilk can provide safe nutrition and immune protection when food, clean water and health services are disrupted.

POST 6

Breastfeeding is also a sustainable food systems issue. Breastmilk is the shortest food chain: mother to child. It requires no industrial production, packaging, transport or waste. #FoodSystems

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EMAIL AND NEWSLETTER COPY

A short text CSAs can adapt for members, partners or decision-makers.

Short newsletter blurb

World Breastfeeding Week 2026 is a critical opportunity to advocate for sustainable support systems for mothers, caregivers and infants. Breastfeeding is one of the safest, most effective and most sustainable ways to support child survival, health and development. But mothers cannot do it alone. They need skilled support, family-friendly workplaces, strong health systems, maternity protection, social protection and protection from harmful commercial influence.

For civil society, WBW is also a moment to call for stronger accountability. Private sector engagement in nutrition must be guided by public interest. Employers can help by creating breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. But where commercial interests undermine breastfeeding,

especially through inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes, civil society must monitor, challenge and advocate for stronger regulation.

This World Breastfeeding Week, we call on governments, donors, employers and partners to prioritise breastfeeding by investing in sustainable support systems and protecting families from misleading marketing.

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TALKING POINTS FOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS

For use with ministries, parliamentarians, donors, SUN platforms, media or partners.

- Open with systems, not individual responsibility: Breastfeeding rates improve when women and families are surrounded by the right policies, services, protection and support.
- Connect breastfeeding to food systems: Breastmilk is the first food. It should be included in food systems, nutrition and climate discussions, not treated as separate from them.
- Name the commercial determinant clearly: Marketing of breast-milk substitutes can influence feeding decisions and weaken confidence in breastfeeding. This is why strong Code legislation and enforcement matter.
- Be precise on private sector engagement: Civil society can engage with employers on workplace support, but BMS-related commercial influence must be monitored and regulated.
- Highlight equity: Mothers in emergencies, informal work, low-income settings or fragile health systems face the greatest barriers and need the strongest support.
- End with action: Ask for one concrete policy or budget commitment: Code enforcement, maternity protection, IYCF in emergencies, MAMI scale-up or breastfeeding counselling.

Three questions to ask decision-makers

1. What is the current status of national legislation and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes?
2. What budget and service investments are in place to ensure quality breastfeeding support before, during and after childbirth, including in emergencies?
3. What policies protect breastfeeding mothers at work, including women in informal, low-paid or insecure employment?

TONE GUIDANCE

Keep the message firm but constructive: support mothers, strengthen systems, protect public health, and be clear that commercial interests must not shape infant feeding decisions.

Sources: This toolkit combines and adapts messages from the following background materials:

- Save the Children. World Breastfeeding Week 2026 Advocacy Key Messages. Final draft.
- Oot, L., Mason, F., and Lapping, K. The First-Food System: The Importance of Breastfeeding in Global Food Systems Discussions. Alive & Thrive / FHI Solutions / Save the Children.

Figures and claims should be checked and adapted against the latest national data before external publication. CSAs are encouraged to add country-specific evidence, policy asks and government commitments..

UPCOMING WEBINAR - JOIN US!

Join SUN CSN and partners for the launch of our webinar series on private sector engagement in nutrition. The first webinar will use breastfeeding protection as a practical case study to explore safeguards, conflict of interest, accountability and civil society action.

Private sector engagement in nutrition: when to engage, when to monitor, when to say no

Thursday 6 August 2026 | 14:00–15:30 CEST | English, French and Spanish

Register here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/wz33t0HwRfCmkRB1o0HauQ>

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