

State of Maternity Protection in 97 countries

An analysis of WBTi country reports

Introduction

For working women to practice exclusive breastfeeding for recommended 6 months, maternity leave of 6 months or more is needed or very helpful. Once a woman returns to work after delivery, mostly a separation between the mother and infant happens. During this period, workplace accommodation for breastfeeding and expressing the breastmilk as well as breastfeeding breaks become important to continue breastfeeding and to provide appropriate complementary feeding.

An increasing number of women are entering the job market and they need maternity protection to make a balance between their productive and reproductive roles to take care of themselves, their children and their families. There are several global instruments recommending appropriate maternity protection including ILO conventions. The ILO's Maternity Protection Convention (MPC) 183 specifies that women workers should receive:

- Health protection, job protection and non-discrimination for pregnant and breastfeeding workers
- At least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave
- One or more paid breastfeeding breaks daily or daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed

A lot of countries have enacted laws to provide maternity protection to at least some groups of women workers. However, there is a wide variation among the countries in policies and programmes to provide appropriate and adequate maternity protection.

IBFAN Asia developed the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi)¹ as a tool to assess ten indicators on the policies and programmes related to infant and young child feeding. One of the indicators assessed is maternity protection. Till date, 97 countries have completed at least one assessment of their national policies and programmes. Some of them have conducted more than one assessment.

WBTi tool examines the policies and programmes of a country on Maternity Protection on following aspects:

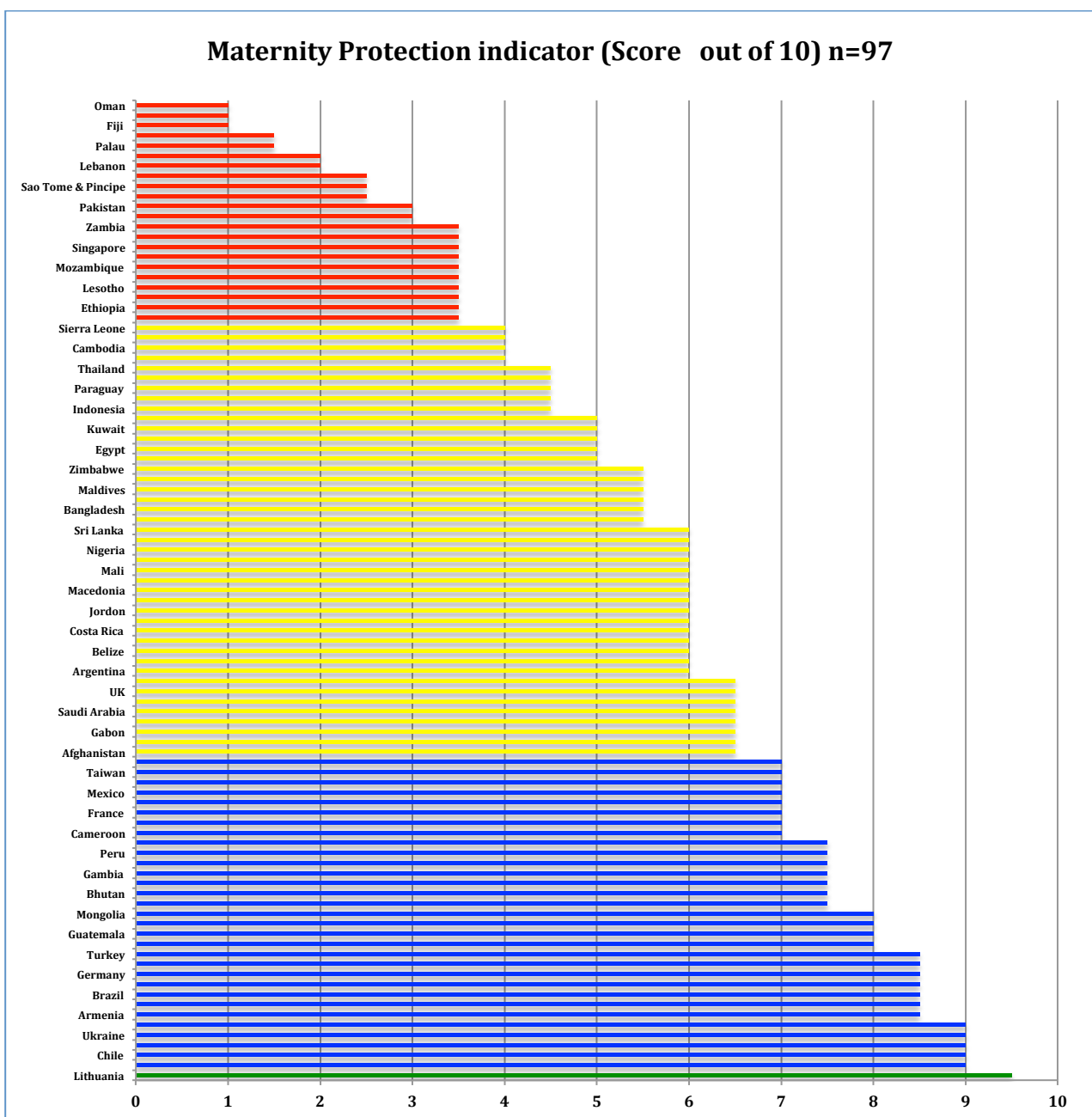
1. The scope (in terms of who is covered)
2. Length and nature of the leave cash and medical benefits
3. Breastfeeding breaks
4. Worksite breastfeeding facilities
5. Health protection for the pregnant and lactating woman and her baby
6. Employment protection and non- discrimination

¹World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi). See: <https://www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org>

Results and Analysis

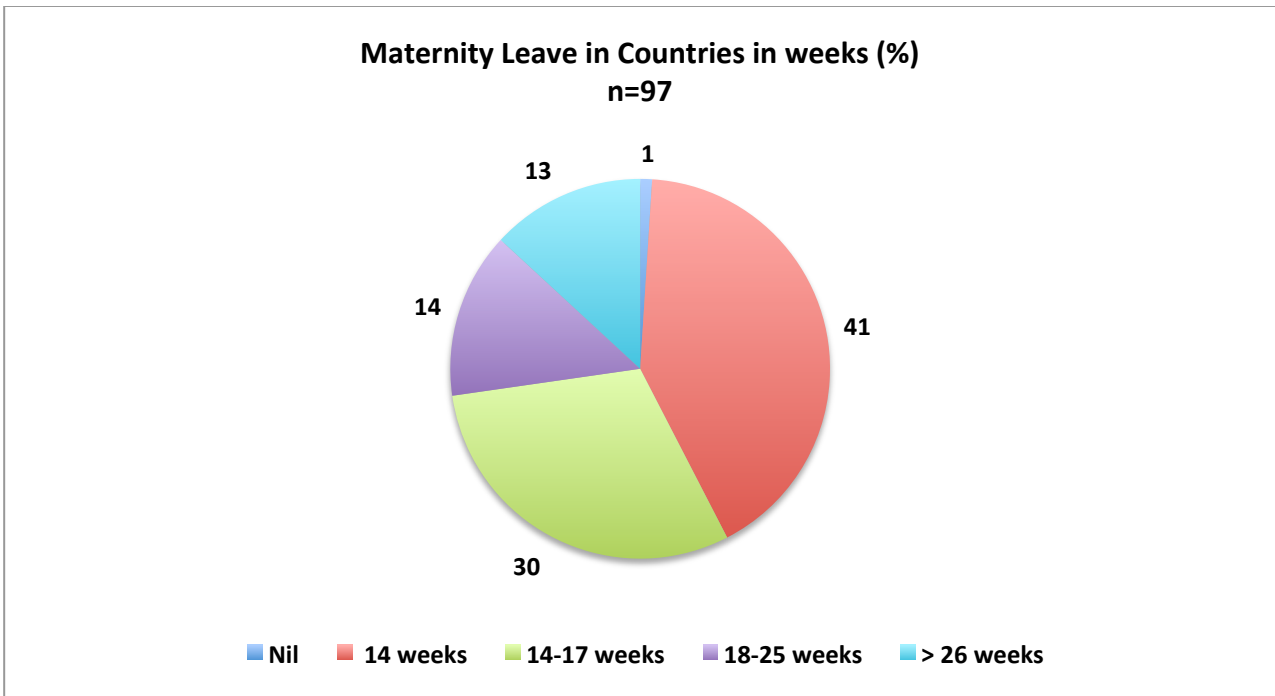
Between 2005–2019, 97 countries undertook at least one WBTi assessment of policies and programmes on IYCF. An analysis of WBTi assessment findings from 97 countries reveals significant gaps in ensuring maternity protection to pregnant and lactating women. Some salient results are analysed below:

1. **Overall score in the Maternity Protection indicator:** Out of 97 countries, only a single country has a score of 9.5 (Green colour); thirty-one countries score between 7.0-9.0 (Blue colour), forty-three countries have a score between 4.0 - 6.5 (Yellow colour), and 22 countries score below 3.5 (Red colour)



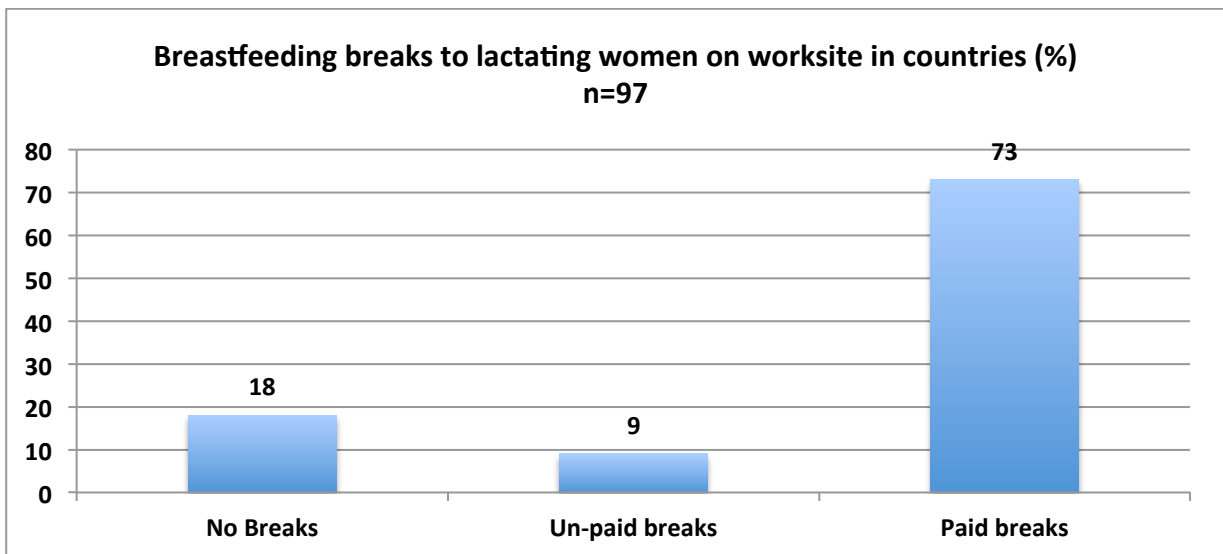
2. Maternity Leave to women covered by the national legislation:

41% countries reportedly provide paid maternity leave of less than 14 weeks. Only 13% countries provide leave of 26 week or more to enable the mother to breastfeed exclusively for recommended 6 months.



3. Breastfeeding breaks:

Legislation in 18% countries does not provide any breastfeeding break during the work hours. While in 73% countries paid breaks and in 9% countries un-paid breaks are available.



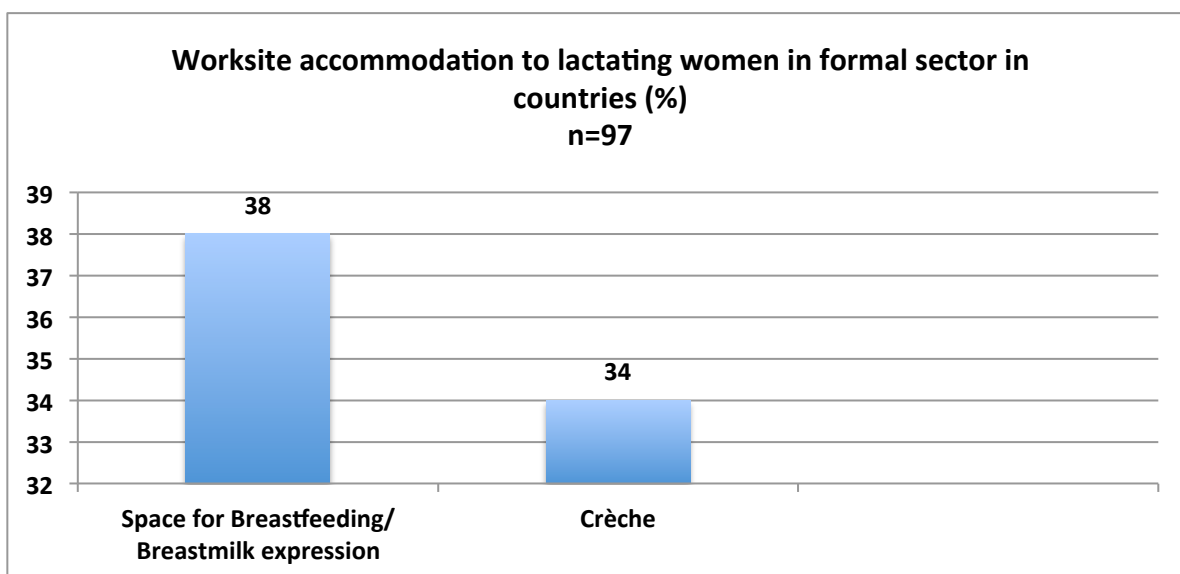
4. Maternity protection to private sector employees:

In 57% countries, legislation provides at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and in 61% countries paid nursing breaks are available to the private sector employees.



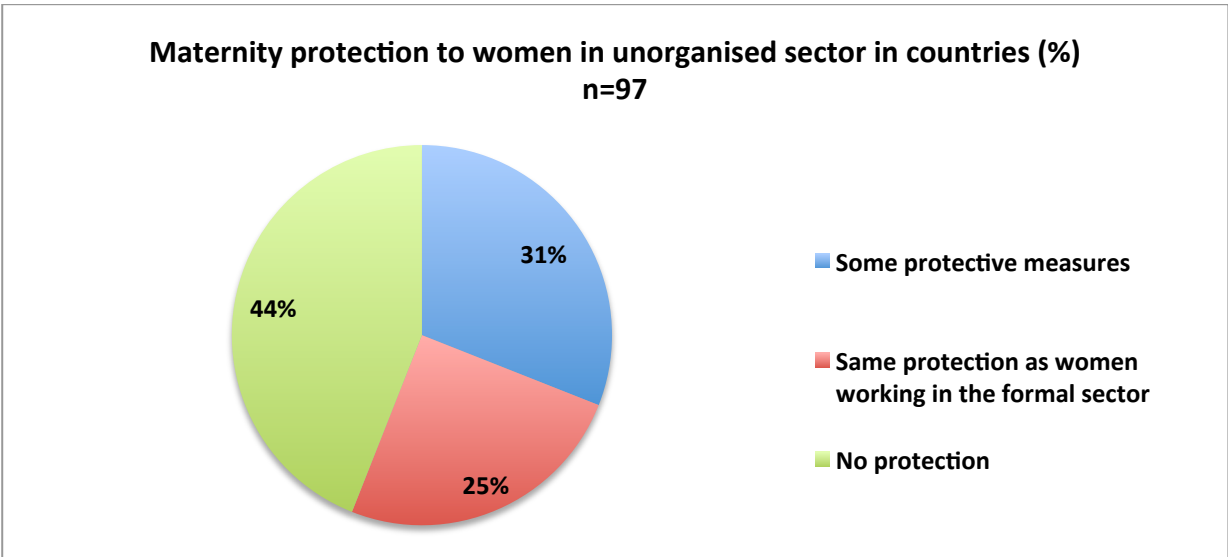
5. Worksite accommodation:

The legislation provides space for breastfeeding/child care in 38% countries and Crèche in 34% countries. Legislations in 26% countries do not provide any worksite accommodation.



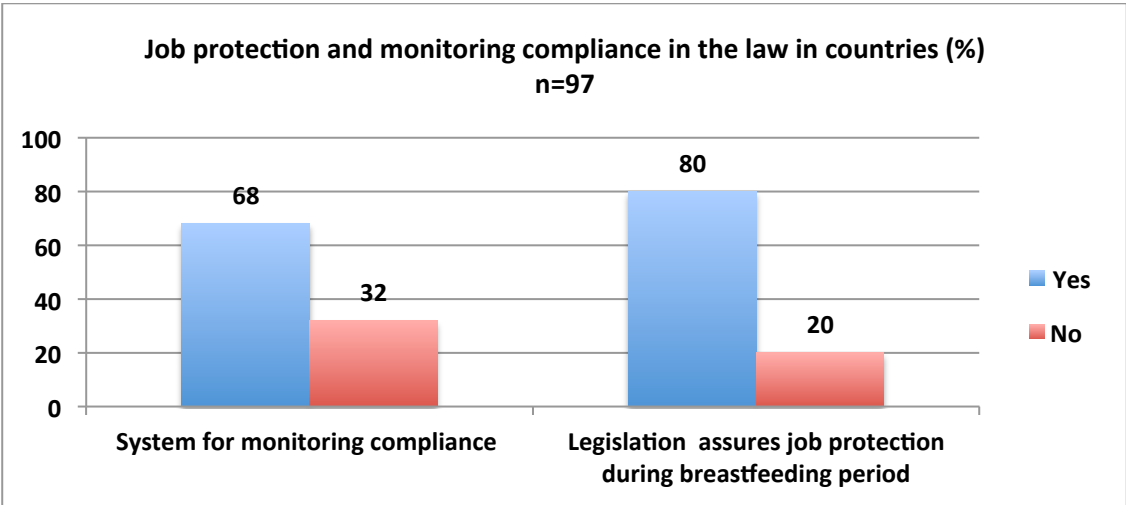
6. Maternity protection to women in un-organised sector

In 44% countries, legislation does not provide any maternity protection to pregnant and lactating women working in the unorganised, informal and agriculture sector. Only in 25% countries, women get same protection in organised and unorganised sector.



7. Job protection and monitoring compliance

In 80% countries, the legislation assures protection of the job and prohibits employment discrimination with the lactating women. In 68% countries, the legislation mandates a system for monitoring the compliance and a way for the workers to complain if their entitlements are not provided.



Conclusion

According to the WBTi assessment reports of 97 countries, there are significant gaps in policies and programmes on providing maternity protection to all pregnant and lactating women. There is an urgent need to strengthen maternity protection provision by the governments in different countries. There is a need for providing adequate maternity leave, worksite accommodation and other facilities, preventing employment discrimination, ensuring job protection and effective monitoring of programme compliance.

Developed by:

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