



Photography: Marcos Arana C

World Breastfeeding Week in Mexico, 2023

**Action to facilitate breastfeeding
for working women in
the informal sector, a must**

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Work to facilitate breastfeeding for working women in the informal sector, a must.

In Mexico, more than thirteen million women working outside the home are in the informal sector and produce half of the 22 per cent of GDP¹ that the informal economy contributes. Working women perform more than three quarters of domestic work, which, if properly accounted, would be equivalent to an additional quarter of the national GDP.

11,474,983 women are heads of household² and are therefore also the main breadwinners for their families. Each year, about 918,000 of these women get pregnant or have children under the age of two. However, none of the women working in the informal sector will benefit from the important legislative changes and programmes that have been recently adopted in Mexico to support working women to breastfeed that are being celebrated during this World Breastfeeding Week.

In urban settings, many of the women who work in markets and retail street sales have their babies with them most of the time. While this makes it possible for breastfeeding mothers to continue breastfeeding, they often do so under extremely difficult conditions. They have no shady and quiet place where they can breastfeed comfortably. Workers who leave their babies at home lack an adequate place where they can express their milk in privacy. Most of the spaces where informal work is carried out do not have decent places where breastfeeding

¹ INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE), población de 15 años y más de edad (ENOE), mayo 2023. Disponible en: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/enoe/15ymas/>

² INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020.



or pregnant mothers can rest, wash or drink water³³. Being a mother for a working woman in the informal sector brings together considerable higher challenges and difficulties.

The tianguis and markets could have a place similar to the tents or breastfeeding corners that are set up to protect lactating women during emergencies. This proposal was briefly tested a few years ago by IBFAN and the Breastfeeding Committee in one of the Mexican states, but could not move forward due to administrative changes and lack of budget. Such a strategy requires relatively few resources and organisation and could be supported by students of nutrition and/or other health-related careers.

A strategy to support working women of the informal sector would have a very positive impact on the health and well-being of millions of women and their babies.

In Mexico City, the Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte y Saberes (PILARES), a successful social programme in Mexico City with more than 350 centres scattered in the most populated neighborhoods, would very likely have the capacity to include breastfeeding women to provide breastfeeding counselling and healthy complementary feeding. The possibilities are countless. However, it is important to problematise this issue and to consult working and breastfeeding women as well as the authorities in order to better understand their needs and proposals.

The extension of maternity leave, parental leave and breastfeeding facilities have indisputable benefits in addition to the social security and other benefits that formal working women have. It is therefore urgent to start working on the development of measures that provide similar benefits for women in the informal sector, otherwise inequality will deepen and injustice will be prolonged.

³³ Zepeda M, Yatziri y Arana C, Marcos, World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative, Mexico. (Informe de 2015 y actualización en 2020). WBTi. Disponible en: <https://www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/uploads/country-data/country-report/WBTi-Mexico-2015.pdf>