

PRESS RELEASE

India Makes Significant Gains in Global Breastfeeding Policy Assessment

Gaps remain in supporting and safeguarding women so they can successfully breastfeed

New Delhi, 1 August, 2025 – India has improved its performance on the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), according to the 6th World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) assessment report “Spotlight on Breastfeeding & Infant and Young Child Feeding in India, launched by the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), here, today.

India, according to the report – which evaluates the country’s policy and programme environment on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding – has moved up from a score of 45 in 2018 to 62 in 2025, out of a maximum score of 100.

India’s global ranking has also improved significantly, rising from 79th to 41st place. The country has moved up in WBTi’s colour coding system from Yellow to Blue, indicating steady progress in policies and programmes that protect, promote and support breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices.

These gains in policy and programme support offer a strong opportunity to improve outcomes. NFHS-5 data that 41% of newborns are breastfed within the first hour of birth, 63% of infants are exclusively breastfed, 45% receive timely complimentary feeding, and 11% meet the minimum acceptable diet. Continued focus on service delivery and community-level support can help bridge these gaps.

This report builds momentum for action as the country marks World Breastfeeding Week 2025, themed: “Prioritise Breastfeeding: Create Sustainable Support Systems.”

The 6th WBTi report highlights key strengths, including strong legal frameworks like the IMS Act and the Maternity Benefits Act, the national MAA programme to promote breastfeeding in hospitals, better community outreach, and improved support for infant feeding during emergencies/disasters, and in the context of HIV. The report also highlights key areas where further progress can unlock greater impact. Strengthening coordination mechanisms, enhancing enforcement of the IMS Act, expanding the reach and effectiveness of the MAA programme, increasing private sector engagement (especially given its significant role in childbirth), and ensuring adequate funding are seen as important next steps. Extending equal maternity benefits to women in the informal sector remains a critical opportunity to promote inclusive support for all mothers.

In evaluating five key indicators of IYCF practices, the report draws on NFHS-5 data and notes the potential to close the gap between the high rate of institutional births and the lower rate of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth (see Fig.1).

The MAA programme, assessed under Indicator 2, has the most scope for strengthening and is the only indicator currently in the ‘Red’ category. Prioritising this area through increased district-level financial support for training, monitoring, and reporting, can lead to significant gains. The report notes that improving coverage and quality may benefit from enhanced staff training at hospitals, greater technical support to states, and the establishment of routine monitoring systems.

Bringing the private sector on board is seen as another key strategy for expanding access to breastfeeding support in both hospital settings and follow-up counselling.

“India’s progress is commendable and encouraging. If India wants to reach the top 10 countries in WBTi rankings, stronger coordination, more funding, and better enforcement of the IMS Act will be crucial, especially since aggressive marketing of baby foods continues,” said Dr. Arun Gupta, lead author of the report and founder of BPNI. “Protecting women and children from commercial influence is key to the success of breastfeeding.”

The report highlights the potential value of reviving the National Steering Committee on Breastfeeding and IYCF, along with the development of a four-year national action plan supported by dedicated funding. It includes suggestions for various ministries and notes that BPNI stands ready to contribute in areas where support is needed. “Major progress might be achieved if the National Steering Committee is revived and a plan of action is developed and monitored,” said Dr Nupur Bidla, the new Central Coordinator of BPNI. “The plan should include action in all areas, including emergencies.”

“We need a coordinated, well-funded plan for capacity building and support that is institutionalised at both national and state levels. Without such a system, frontline workers and mothers remain unsupported, both in the hospitals where births take place and during follow up care,” said Dr. Vandana Prasad, a community pediatrician with the Public Health Resource Society. She also stressed the need to amend the Maternity Benefit Act 2017 to extend protection to all women, especially those working in the informal sector.

The report is based on a comprehensive assessment of the policies and programmes using the global WBTi tools. It was developed by BPNI with inputs from a core group of experts from several institutions (see Annex).

Full Report: <https://www.bpni.org/india-policy-report/>

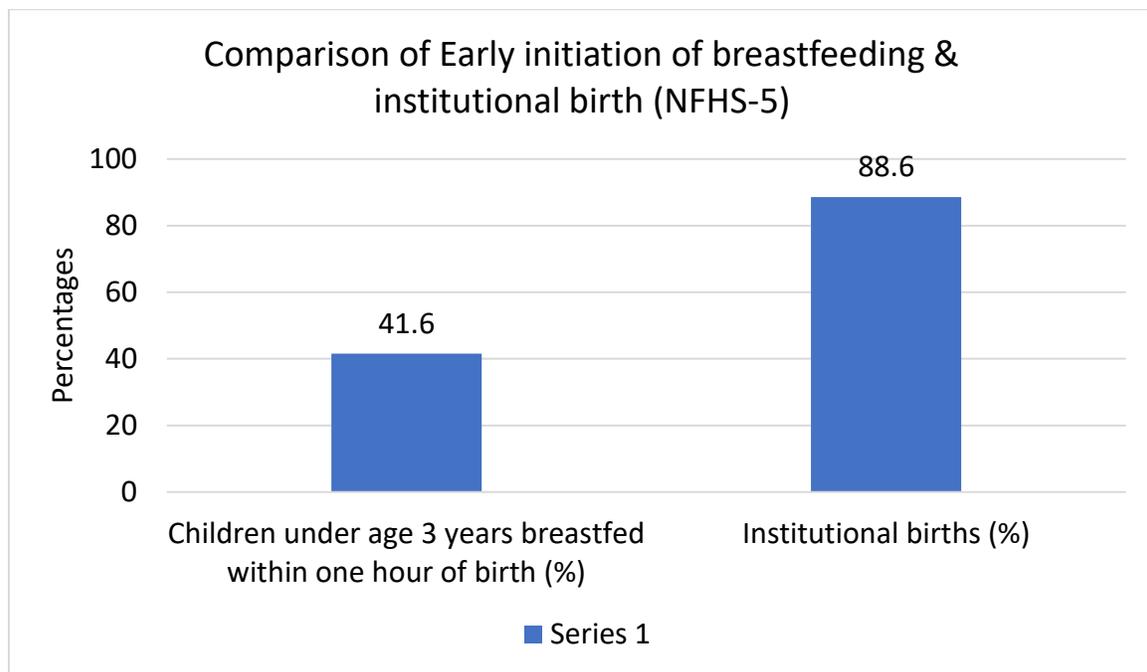
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Annex: Core Group Members or Representatives of the following Organizations

Doctors For You (DFY), Public Health Resource Network (PHRS), Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), UNICEF India, National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW), Pediatric and Adolescent Nutrition (PAN) Society, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) or Savitribai Phule National Institute of Women and Child Development (SPNIWCD), Kalawati Saran Children's Hospital (KSCH)

Fig. 1



About WBTi

The World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) <https://www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/> is a global assessment tool developed by BPNI/IBFAN and used in over 100 countries. Based on WHO's tools, it objectively evaluates ten indicators of policies and programmes and five of infant feeding practices, producing a composite score, colour coding, and global ranking. In partnership with the Global Breastfeeding Collective, led by UNICEF and WHO a WBTi project has been launched to mobilise 50 countries by 2027. The Collective uses WBTi data annually to update its Report Cards.

About BPNI www.bpni.org

BPNI is a 33-year-old independent non-profit organisation committed to advancing child health and nutrition in India through protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding, with its mission to conduct policy analysis and advocacy, capacity building, development of tools for implementing programmes, the BPNI strives to influence the development of sustainable, evidence-based strategies to improve infant feeding practices across the country.