

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Session 68 / January 2015

---

**REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF  
INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING  
IN TURKMENISTAN**



December 2014

**Prepared by:**

Geneva Infant Feeding Association (IBFAN – GIFA) - IBFAN global liaison office

[www.ibfan.org](http://www.ibfan.org)

Tel. +41 22 798 91 64

## **SUMMARY**

### ***The following obstacles/problems have been identified:***

- Lack of recent and detailed data on infant and young child feeding issues.
- Decline of breastfeeding as a concern of public health. Consequent lack of knowledge about optimal breastfeeding practices.
- Very low rate of exclusive breastfeeding under the age of 6 months (11%)
- Only few provisions of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes can be found in the national legislation.
- Lack of recent information about the number of hospitals which are certified as “baby-friendly” as well as whether they respect the BFHI standards.
- No provision allowing working mothers to breastfeed in workplaces.
- Lack of knowledge on different ways of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Particularly, no information on HIV and breastfeeding.
- Absence of emergency preparedness plan to ensure integrated response to protect and support breastfeeding/infant and young child feeding in case of emergencies.

### ***Our recommendations include:***

- Ensure **systematic collection of data** on infant and young child feeding.
- Raise awareness about **optimal breastfeeding practices** among the population.
- **Provide information** on the **2013 Law on Breastfeeding** as well as the **National Programme on Nutrition for 2013-2017**.
- Fully implement and enforce the **International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes** and set **independent monitoring system**.
- Strengthen **BFHI implementation** and **provide relevant information**.
- Strengthen **maternity protection, in particular by allowing breastfeeding breaks to nursing mothers**.
- Raise awareness about **HIV mother-to-child transmission** among the population, especially mothers, through **comprehensive promotion campaigns**.
- Provide integrated response to ensure **protection and support of breastfeeding in case of emergencies** through the implementation of a **national plan** and designation of **persons to coordinate activities**.

## 1. General points concerning reporting to the CRC

---

In 2015, the CRC Committee will review Turkmenistan’s combined 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report.

At the last review in 2006 (Session 42), IBFAN addressed a letter to the members of the CRC Committee, pointing out the very little data available concerning the state of breastfeeding.

In its [Concluding Observations](#), the Committee mentioned specifically breastfeeding as well as several related issues. It expressed concern that *“maternal mortality [...] remains high, official information about the infant mortality rate are inaccurate, [...] and there is a lack of updated data on the nutritional status of children”* (§51).

Therefore, the CRC Committee recommended that Turkmenistan *“strengthen its efforts to improve the health situation of children in the State party, including through: [...] **urgently addressing the issue of infant and child mortality**, especially by focusing on preventive measures and treatment; increasing efforts to further **reduce maternal mortality** throughout the country; **adopting and implementing a national law on marketing of breastmilk substitutes** and ensuring that all segments of the society are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic **knowledge of child health and nutrition, including the advantages of breastfeeding”*** (§52).

## 2. General situation concerning breastfeeding in Turkmenistan

---

### General data

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Annual number of births, crude (thousands) <sup>1</sup>	-	-	111.3	-
Birth rate, crude (per 1,000 people) <sup>2</sup>	22	22	22	-
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <sup>3</sup>	25	24	24	23
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <sup>4</sup>	51	50	48 <sup>5</sup>	47
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) <sup>6</sup>	61	59	57 <sup>7</sup>	55
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) <sup>8</sup>	65	-	-	61

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF country statistics, available at: [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan_statistics.html)

<sup>2</sup> World Bank data, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.CBRT.IN/countries>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Statistics, available at: <http://data.unicef.org/child-mortality/neonatal> ; UN IGME (2014), *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: report 2014*, available at [www.childmortality.org](http://www.childmortality.org)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Statistics, available at: <http://data.unicef.org/child-mortality/under-five> ; UN IGME , see above

<sup>5</sup> This figure is 45 in the UNICEF Statistics by country. See [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan_statistics.html)

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF Statistics, see above; UN IGME, see above

<sup>7</sup> This figure is 53 in the UNICEF Statistics by country. See above

<sup>8</sup> World Bank data, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT/countries>

## IBFAN – International Baby Food Action Network

	2010	2011	2012	2013
<i>Delivery care coverage:</i> <sup>9</sup>				
Skilled attendant at birth	99.5%	99.5%	99.5%	-
Institutional delivery	97.8%	97.8%	97.8%	-
C-section	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	-
Stunting (under 5 years) <sup>10</sup>		19%		

### **Breastfeeding data**<sup>11</sup>

	2000	2006	2008-2012
Early initiation of breastfeeding (within one hour from birth)		60 %	59.8 %
Children exclusively breastfed (0-5 months)	12.7 %	11 %	11 %
Introduction of solid, semi-solid or soft foods (6-8 months)		54 %	53.6 %
Breastfeeding at age 2		37 %	36.7 %

### **Early initiation of breastfeeding**

Although the percentages referring to the presence of skilled attendants at birth and of institutional deliveries are very high, **4 children out of 10 are not breastfed within one hour** from birth in Turkmenistan. This can be due to the little knowledge on optimal breastfeeding practices on the side of the health care professionals and, at the same time, a non conformity with one of the ten steps to successful breastfeeding<sup>12</sup> that are necessary for an institution to be certified as baby-friendly, according to the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative.

### **Exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months**

From the data on exclusive breastfeeding, it can be seen how **almost 90% of children are not exclusively breastfed under six months of age**. This rate places Turkmenistan among the countries with the poorest performance scores according to the *State of the World's Mothers* report of 2012<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> The data refer to the years 2008-2012. Source: UNICEF, available at: [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan_statistics.html)

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, see above

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, see above; UNICEF statistics on nutrition, available at: <http://data.unicef.org/nutrition/iyfc>

<sup>12</sup> "Step 4 - Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within half an hour of birth." For the ten steps to successful breastfeeding see [www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding/baby.htm](http://www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding/baby.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Save the Children (2012), *Nutrition in the First 1000 Days. State of the World's Mothers 2012*, p.31. Full report available at: [www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/STATEOFTHEWORLDSMOTHERSREPORT2012.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/STATEOFTHEWORLDSMOTHERSREPORT2012.PDF)

It can be seen how from 2000 onwards there has been a further decline in the already low rate of children who are exclusively breastfed during the first six months of age. The trend should be possibly inverted.

### **Continued breastfeeding at 2 years**

Turkmenistan shows a poor result also in the rate of continued breastfeeding at 2 years, from which it results that **over 60% of children are not continuously breastfed when they reach the age of 2**, in contrast with the WHO recommendations<sup>14</sup>.

After an analysis the information available, it can be seen how the **mortality rates are quite high in Turkmenistan compared to the average rates registered in the same area**. Turkmenistan belongs to the European region in the WHO system: in 2013, the overall European under-five mortality rate was 12, the infant mortality rate was 11 and the neonatal mortality rate was 6<sup>15</sup>. Equally, in the UNICEF system, the Eastern and Central Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States region had the following average rates: in 2013, under-five mortality rate was 20, the infant mortality rate was 17 and the neonatal mortality rate was 9<sup>16</sup>, against Turkmenistan's under-five mortality rate of 55, infant mortality rate of 47 and neonatal mortality rate of 23 in the same year. Also, a large majority of children are not adequately fed according to the optimal breastfeeding practices, as highlighted by Turkmenistan's breastfeeding-related indicators and as previously mentioned. The Government of Turkmenistan should therefore increase and improve the **promotion of optimal infant and young child feeding practices**, as well as **enhance measures aimed at reducing neonatal, infant and under-five mortality rates**.

## **3. Government efforts to encourage breastfeeding**

---

### **National Policies**

In April 2009, Turkmenistan adopted the national **Law on Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding and Requirements for Infant Feeding Products**.<sup>17</sup> The Law determines the main public policies in the area of child nutrition through support, protection and promotion of breastfeeding, and regulates the distribution and marketing of adequate and safe baby foods.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The WHO recommendations on infant and child feeding can be found at:

<http://who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/>

<sup>15</sup> UN IGME, *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: report 2014*, p. 26-27, available at [www.childmortality.org](http://www.childmortality.org)

<sup>16</sup> Idem.

<sup>17</sup> Law of Turkmenistan on protection and propaganda of breastfeeding and requirements for infant food, available at: <https://extranet.who.int/nutrition/gina/en/node/8752>

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *Turkmenistan marks the National Breastfeeding Week in line with the national law*, available at: [www.untuk.org/content/view/389/122/](http://www.untuk.org/content/view/389/122/)

At the beginning of 2013, the Government of Turkmenistan endorsed two national documents on breastfeeding and nutrition: the **Law on Breastfeeding** (which appear to be an amendment to the 2009 Law) and the **National Programme on Nutrition for 2013-2017**. These documents “aim at creating conditions for supporting efforts to increase rates of **breastfeeding** by ensuring that all mothers have **access to skilled support** to initiate breastfeeding at maternity facilities within the framework of the *Baby-friendly Hospitals Initiative (BFHI)*. The Law and the Programme stipulate **building the capacity of primary health care workers** to provide skilled counselling on breastfeeding as well as to carry out regular nutrition related awareness-raising and communication campaigns and other events.”<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added)

We have **no information about the current status and implementation of these policies**.

### **Promotion campaigns**

As many other countries, Turkmenistan celebrates the **National Breastfeeding Week**, during which programmes on benefits of breastfeeding are broadcasted, information materials is disseminated and workshops are organized so that new mothers and health workers can become aware of the importance of correct infant and young child feeding practices.<sup>20</sup> In 2008, the celebration of the National Breastfeeding Week has been an occasion to create and distribute to 100,000 breastfeeding mothers “a booklet that contains information on the benefits of breastfeeding, principles of exclusive breastfeeding and significance of the timely and correct introduction of supplementary food from 6 months.”<sup>21</sup> Similar promotional initiatives have been put in place during the following National Breastfeeding Weeks<sup>22</sup>.

Furthermore, the 2009 Law on Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding and Requirements for Infant Feeding Products provides that the Ministry of Health supports, promotes and protects breastfeeding *inter alia* through the **development and dissemination of information, health education** with regard to infants and young children feeding issues. The 2009 Law affirms also that breastfeeding would be **promoted through the mass media** (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Turkmenistan, available at: [www.untuk.org/content/view/766/105/](http://www.untuk.org/content/view/766/105/)

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *Turkmenistan marks the National Breastfeeding Week*, 2004, available at: [www.unicef.org/ceecis/media\\_4892.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_4892.html)

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *National Breastfeeding Week in Turkmenistan focuses on supporting breastfeeding mothers*, 1 September 2008, available at: [www.unicef.org/ceecis/media\\_9560.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_9560.html)

<sup>22</sup> For articles related to the National Breastfeeding Week celebrations in Turkmenistan visit the UNICEF Turkmenistan website: [www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/](http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/)

<sup>23</sup> Law of Turkmenistan on protection and propaganda of breastfeeding and requirements for infant food, see above

### **The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and its implementation in Turkmenistan**

**Only few provisions** of the Code have been transposed into law and **there is no information** available about the progress in its implementation, especially with regard to **monitoring and enforcement measures**.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Training of Health Professionals**

According to articles issued by the UNICEF Media Centre, **thousands of health workers had been trained** in 2004<sup>25</sup> and 2005<sup>26</sup>, and many programmes on strengthening the institutional capacity of the health sector appeared to be under way.<sup>27</sup> However, providing more specific information is advisable, especially an assessment of the impact of such trainings.

Additionally, the celebration of the **National Breastfeeding Week** has also been an occasion for providing some specific training on the subject of breastfeeding to several categories of health care professionals. In particular, during the 2008 National Breastfeeding Week, **family doctors, nurses and the medical academic institutions** have been invited to a series of **trainings on the latest recommendations for feeding and nutrition of infants and young children** and received a book on breastfeeding published by UNICEF and the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)**

---

In the period 2009-2010, **52 hospitals were certified as “baby-friendly”**. Those hospitals represented **81% of all maternity facilities in the country**.<sup>29</sup>

More updated data are however needed. In fact, after the certification, hospitals should maintain observation of the BFHI standards and without **appropriate monitoring**, there is an

---

<sup>24</sup> WHO, *Country Implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes: Status Report 2011*, available at: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85621/1/9789241505987\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85621/1/9789241505987_eng.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *Turkmenistan marks the National Breastfeeding Week, 2004*, see above

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *UNICEF Turkmenistan supports Government in marking National Breastfeeding Week, 1 September 2005*, available at: [www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/media\\_2758.html](http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/media_2758.html)

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *Turkmenistan marks the National Breastfeeding Week*, see above

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF Media Centre, *National Breastfeeding Week in Turkmenistan focuses on supporting breastfeeding mothers*, 1 September 2008, available at: [www.unicef.org/ceecis/media\\_9560.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_9560.html)

<sup>29</sup> Miriam H. Labbok, *Global Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative Monitoring Data: Update and Discussion*, *Breastfeeding Medicine*, Vol. 7, N.4, 2012, p. 218, available at: [www.researchgate.net/publication/230617756\\_Global\\_baby-friendly\\_hospital\\_initiative\\_monitoring\\_data\\_update\\_and\\_discussion/file/79e415037abf6c5f21.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/230617756_Global_baby-friendly_hospital_initiative_monitoring_data_update_and_discussion/file/79e415037abf6c5f21.pdf)

obvious risk that such standards are no longer complied with, regardless of the previous certification.

## 5. Maternity protection for working women

---

Limited information is available on maternity protection, which is provided by a **2007 Social Security Law**.

### **Maternity leave**

There is no minimum qualifying period in order to benefit from the maternal benefits.<sup>30</sup>

**Benefits:** 100% of the salary is paid **for 56 days before and 56 days after the expected date** of childbirth. The period may be extended to 72 days after the childbirth in case of a difficult childbirth or to 96 days after the childbirth in case of multiple births.<sup>31</sup>

### **Breastfeeding breaks**

There is **no information** available with regard to breastfeeding breaks.

## 6. HIV and infant feeding

---

**No information** is available about the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Turkmenistan.

Furthermore, we could not retrieve **any specific information concerning HIV and breastfeeding and mother-to-child transmission**.

## 7. Infant feeding in emergencies (IFE)

---

Currently, there is **no information available on any emergency preparedness plan** to ensure integrated response in order to protect and support breastfeeding in case of emergencies.

---

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Social Security Administration, Office of Retirement and Disability Policy, Social Security Programs throughout the World: Asia and the Pacific, 2012, available at:

[www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2012-2013/asia/turkmenistan.html](http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2012-2013/asia/turkmenistan.html)

<sup>31</sup> Idem.